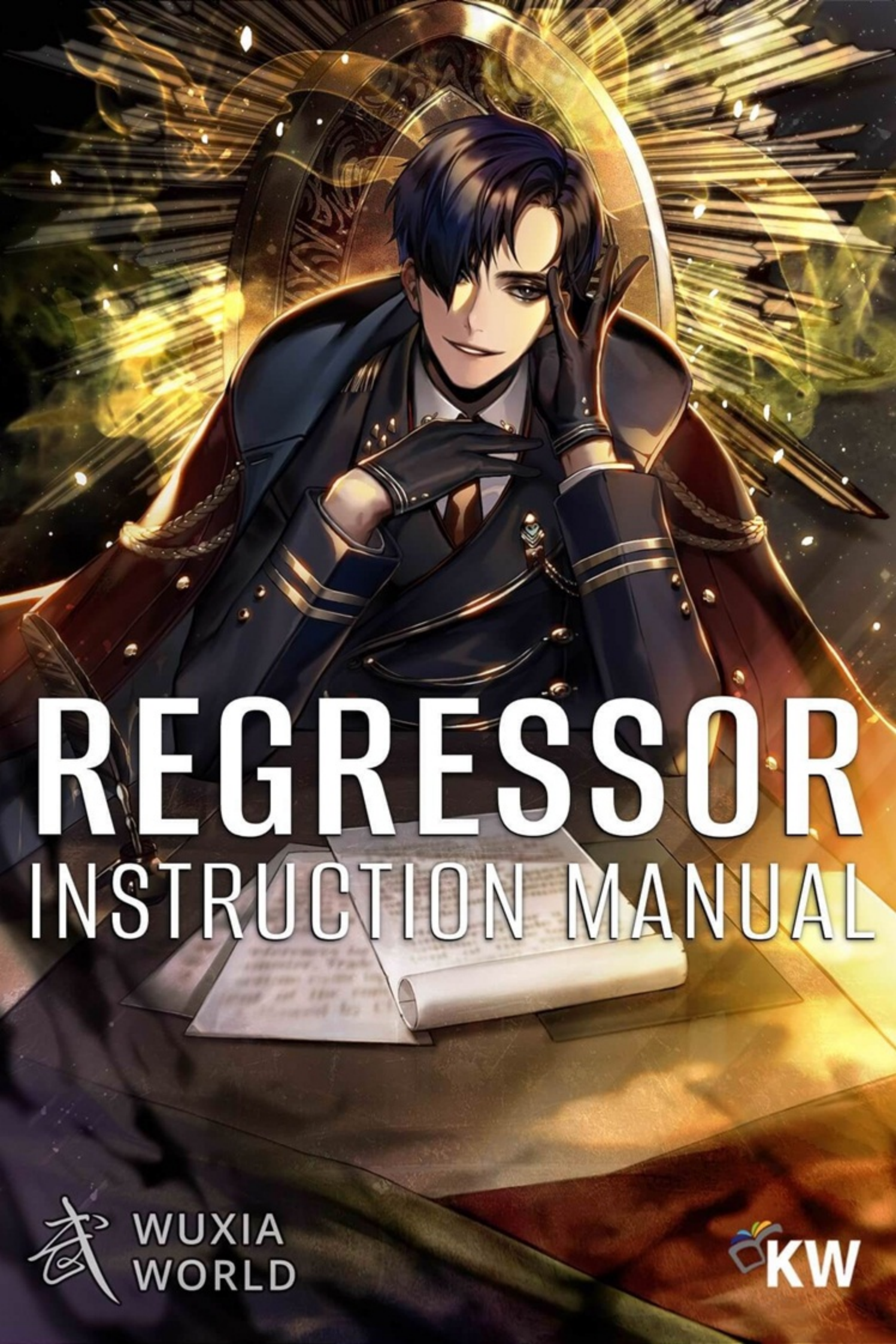
REGRESSOR
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
WUXIA WORLD
KW

REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

– 회귀자 사용설명서 –

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Lee Jihye

Cha Hee-ra

Benigore's Goddess

CHAPTER 50
THE FREE CITY OF LINDEL (1)

I didn't really think that I needed to save them. It was understandable for the Blue Guild to not take an interest in them because considering the amount of money and time they had to spend in order to foster proper combat members, it was better to avoid the possible small group of elites that were among the survivors. If the Blue Guild hadn't recruited us, they might have taken advantage of this opportunity, but the guild had already spent a lot of money in order to recruit Kim Hyun-Sung's party. Since another dungeon was going to open, the chances of these people getting recruited were low, and investing in them would be a stupid thing to do.

'They're not incompetent… '

"Well then…"

When I saw the big shots of the guild turn around after bowing, the remaining people looked dumbfounded.

"Mr. H-Hyun-Sung!"

In the end, someone yelled out his name.

"…"

"P-Please… take us… with you."

It was a slightly ridiculous request and I knew exactly who it was. It was one of the survivors from the shelter, but I didn't really remember his name.

He was one of the people that aggressively took the supplies that Kim Hyun-Sung brought and talked badly about Jung Ha-Yan. Not only did he quietly look away when we asked him to go hunting with us, but when Jung Jin-Ho, who was now dead, first came to the shelter, he stuck next to him. He was beyond shameless.

Not only did Kim Hyun-Sung create a safe shelter in the tutorial so that people could

rest, but he even got supplies for them. Even after having received sufficient training, he was still asking Kim Hyun-Sung to take responsibility for his life. The instructors even looked confused.

In some ways, he was pretty amazing because despite being the weak one, he made that kind of request, which was admirable. If I was in his place, I wouldn't be able to say what he said.

I didn't bother saying anything because I wasn't the target of his request. It was solely up to Kim Hyun-Sung to make the decision.

'I'm sure he's not that big of a pushover.'

Even if he was a pushover, I was sure that it wasn't to that point, no, I was actually kind of worried. After all, gathering survivors in the tutorial dungeon and setting up a shelter for them wasn't something an ordinary human could think of doing.

"You should take… responsibility until the end…" the man said.

'Bullshit.'

He probably didn't understand what he was saying because desperation made a person stronger, but it sometimes made them dumber.

Lee Sang-Hee quietly looked at Kim Hyun-Sung and was asking whether they knew each other from the tutorial dungeon.

"U-Us too…"

I couldn't help but laugh because crazy people that gained courage because of him started to appear one by one. It was really shocking because the losers who didn't make any decision back at the shelter were asking him to save them from hell.

"You're not just going to abandon us, right?" he asked.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung!"

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, please take us…"

Kim Hyun-Sung started walking towards them slowly. I was a bit worried, but seeing

him bite his lips made me think that he was angry. It was an obvious reaction and even if a monk was in his situation, I was sure that he would be angry too.

As expected, Kim Hyun-Sung slightly lowered his head and spoke. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry?”

“I think our relationship ends here,” he said.

“Heup.”

It was only for a moment, but I almost laughed out loud because I felt a bit more satisfied than I thought.

“Rather than staying with me, it’ll be better if you live your lives in a new environment. It had been a short time, but I had fun,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“T-That’s…”

“I’m sure the city is safe.”

“Don’t talk so… irresponsibly,” the man said.

I didn’t know which part about that was irresponsible.

I might’ve seemed arrogant for stepping up, but I couldn’t help but take a step forward and say something. “We have no obligation to take responsibility for you.”

“Huh?”

“The inside of the city should be safe. It may not be the comfortable life that you’re expecting, but at least you won’t be in danger,” I said.

“But…”

“I’ll say it again, but Mr. Hyun-Sung and I have no obligation to look after you. We’re strangers,” I said.

“…”

Despite explaining it nicely, he looked as if he didn't understand, but he also looked as if he had been wronged. He was probably thinking how it was unfair that we were on this side while they were on the other side.

'Idiots.'

You couldn't gain anything without sacrifices and I was sure that he would never realize that. The man looked as if he was going to run to us and beg us to help him, so with a small smirk, I took out the gold coin bag that was in my pocket.

"It's a bit awkward to say that this is going to be our last meeting, but here's a gift. I'm sure it'll help a little," I said.

The way he hurriedly grabbed the bag that I gave him looked ridiculous. He looked as if he was betrayed, but he must have realized that the slightly heavy bag was precious because he immediately placed it in his pocket. It really wasn't that much, but despite that, the people around him instantly stared at him.

"T-Thank you," the man said.

"I hope you survive and if we ever cross paths again…"

"Yes…"

It seemed like he still hadn't realized the fact that he wouldn't be able to gain anything if he didn't sacrifice anything. I wasn't sure if he would be able to protect the gold or himself once he entered the city, but it was honestly none of my business because it was nothing more than me throwing a few coins to get rid of the leech.

Lee Ji-Hye must have realized the reason why I willingly threw the bag towards him because she was looking at the man like an idiot. It was a bit surprising that she wasn't trying to join us, but seeing her quietly watch the situation made me think that she was thinking about something.

'Lee Ji-Hye… '

There was a chance that another guild may contact her. Since her nature was similar to mine, she would probably grow by using her skills in talking.

'Such a waste… '

Taking her in myself was burdensome, but letting her go was a waste. It was that attitude of hers that caught my attention. Her confidence showed that she had nothing to lose and for some reason, it was pulling me in more.

'I don't have to be with you.'

It seemed like that was what she was saying.

I already checked with Mind's Eye that there wasn't anything special about her stats, but I thought about how she would be better than some random person, so I spoke while looking at Lee Ji-Hye. "I'll… see you again."

"Oh… okay," she said.

I didn't say it to the man, but I guess my words made him happy. When our eyes met, Lee Ji-Hye lightly nodded. I wasn't sure if she was going to apply to the Blue Guild, but I was certain that we were going to see each other again.

When I immediately turned around, both Lee Sang-Hee and Kim Hyun-Sung nodded and before I could start walking, I heard a voice. "Mr. Ki-Young, you're a really kind-hearted person and the basic living support fund that you gave seemed like a good amount too…" the instructor said.

"That was nothing. I mean, we did spend some time together in the tutorial dungeon. So, are we heading to Lindel now?" I asked.

"Yes, we are somewhat done with the preparations. We actually wanted to take our time, but there were a lot of things that we needed to prepare."

"Oh, regarding the trainees…"

"They'll immediately head to the free city with us. Let's head out," the instructor said.

"Okay."

The instructors and the guild members started moving busily as if the life they had in the tutorial dungeon was now over. I wasn't exactly fond of the survivors, but I was looking forward to them living in a totally new city.

The gifts that Cha Hee-Ra sent were stacked high and I saw a few of the guild

members following me.

“Oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan called out.

“Hyung-nim!” Park Deok-Gu called out.

Of course, both Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu were prepared to leave. The slightly haggard-looking Jung Ha-Yan stood next to me and Park Deok-Gu spoke as if he was sad about leaving.

“I didn’t think that we were going to leave so soon, but I guess it’s urgent. It’s unfortunate…”

“What is…”

“This!”

There was a small boat that was tied to a rope. It didn’t look incomplete and I never imagined that he would bring with us the boat that he was building by the lake. I wasn’t sure if he was good with his hands, but the quality looked pretty good.

‘Why did he make it so nicely?’

“…”

“If we stayed a bit longer, I was thinking about sailing at the shelter nearby… I decided to bring it with me since I put some time into building it,” he said.

“We have a lot of baggage…”

“We can put them in the boat so it won’t be a problem… and I think it’ll help with training my strength. If you get tired while walking, you and noonim can ride it together while I pull, right hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu said.

“It’s not that far so you don’t have to force yourself to do that,” I replied.

For some reason, I didn’t want to ride it right now.

“I heard that there isn’t a lake near the free city… ugh,” he commented.

“Let’s ride it together later… o-oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Yeah, let’s do that,” I said.

When I lightly patted her head, I noticed her smiling as if she was in a good mood. I felt relieved because her condition looked better than I expected. I wasn’t certain, but it seemed like she talked about me whenever she was with Park Deok-Gu. I was then able to realize the fact that Park Deok-Gu played a big part in calming Jung Ha-Yan’s mind.

“I think we’re leaving now,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Okay, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I said.

The Blue Guild that was neither big nor small started to move slowly. I was a bit annoyed by the fact that we had to walk for a long time, but it was fun as well.

“And so… I used a new spell today…”

“Yes, yes.”

“I saw it myself and it was really amazing… noonim started reciting a spell and the lake suddenly split. A long time ago, a lady that lived in the same neighborhood told me that someone named Mase or something had once split the ocean. It felt like I was really looking at that scene,” Park Deok-Gu explained.

“I’m sure that the man’s name was Moses,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Ahh! Yes, I think Moses was the man’s name. Dude, you’re really smart. So anyways,” Park Deok-Gu said.

Park Deok-Gu was talking a lot, Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he was in a good mood and Jung Ha-Yan was walking while holding my hand tightly. I looked at her walking half asleep while holding my hand tightly. I guess she didn’t really get much sleep.

While walking, the executives of the Blue Guild also made time to explain a few things, and we enjoyed what could possibly be our last break time.

After walking for a while, I saw a tall clock tower.

When I quietly looked to the side, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung's expression. This was the start for me, but it was also the start for him. His face looked complicated, so I couldn't guess what he was thinking, but it was only natural for him to have a lot of thoughts. The things that happened in the past, the things that were going to happen in the future, the Blue Guild, and our party. He looked as if he was calmly organizing his thoughts.

Jung Ha-Yan looked as if she was looking at a house for newlyweds and I guess she thought of this place like a home that we were going to live in because a smile appeared on her face.

"That's…"

It was the location where the earthlings settled down within the Holy Empire.

"Lindel…"

Lindel, the free city.

"Hello world, Park Deok-Gu is here!" he shouted.

"Hahaha!"

CHAPTER 51
THE FREE CITY OF LINDEL (2)

“Wooooooooow.”

“Wow…”

Both Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan exclaimed loudly and the executives of the Blue Guild smiled lightly as they watched us. This was our first time in the city and I guess seeing our reaction reminded them of their first time here.

As soon as the west gate opened, I saw a slightly magnificent city. For the basic architectural style, they must have used western architectural designs as a reference and it felt like the earthlings were living in different parts of the city. More than that, I saw people with black hair.

“Korean people have settled down in the free city of Lindel,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“Oh, I heard that people from other countries had been summoned here as well,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Yes. The Koreans, Japanese, and Taiwanese were summoned for the tutorial dungeon that the Holy Empire possesses. They’ve also settled down in a city within the Holy Empire and have been living there since then. You’ll be able to see Japanese and Taiwanese people in Lindel as well since we’re all earthlings and have been living all this time while trading things with each other,” she explained

“I see,” I said.

It just had to be Japanese. I didn’t have any hostility towards them, but for some reason, it didn’t feel right.[1]

“And the Republic…”

“The Chinese and Russians are being summoned,” she answered.

Being summoned here was probably better than being summoned over there.

When I looked around again, I saw many different sights. I saw people selling items in shops and parties that were about to go out for a hunt.

“We’re recruiting priests.”

“We’re recruiting priests that are willing to go hunting with us.”

“I’m selling items! I have rare ranked items!”

It was as if the squares that I saw in games were being reenacted in real life. It was quite lively. I was sure that Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan were widening their eyes because of these sights.

The buildings weren’t that high but they had a vintage look. I saw fancy shops from time to time and also saw people eating while sitting on their terraces. I felt like I had traveled somewhere overseas.

I couldn't help but smile when I saw our people looking around, but of course, the fancy buildings weren’t the only things that caught my attention.

“Hm… I see the slums,” I said.

“Yes.”

Unlike the west side where the guild was located, I saw abandoned buildings far away. Even from here, I was able to see it at a glance and even though I couldn’t see the living conditions of the people over there, it was obvious. The gap between the rich and poor was larger than I thought.

“The city itself has been implementing welfare policies, but the effects weren't really that good…” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“I see.”

‘I’m sure everyone is just keeping quiet about it.’

Right now, it was none of my business.

When we left the entrance and passed the square, I saw a large building. When Lee Sang-Hee saw Park Deok-Gu's large eyes, she quietly smiled and spoke. "Welcome to the Blue Guild."

"Ohhhh!"

It was bigger than I thought. I saw a tall building and just from looking at the outside, it didn't seem like a guild that was in decline. Actually, I thought that maybe they focused on the exterior of the building more *because* they were in decline.

I guess seeing our reaction was funny because Lee Sang-Hee lightly smiled again before she continued to talk. "I'll guide you myself."

"Okay."

"The first floor is the lobby and the rest area. You can think of it as a place where we usually receive requests from other guilds and not only that, but we've also prepared a place where you'll be able to rest. If you're having a simple meeting, you can use the bar that's on the first floor. Since other parties and guild members often gather here, I hope you'll use this place often," she said.

"Okay, got it," I said.

"Ohh… I guess we can drink alcohol here, hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu said.

"You can and I'm pretty confident that our pub is a lot better than the ones out there. The guild's cafeteria is in the basement so you can use it anytime and of course, it's free," she said.

"T-That's nice…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Party seven can use the second floor," Lee Sang-Hee said.

"The second floor?"

"Yes, let's head up there together."

It felt like we were looking at a house we just bought.

When the receptionist that was quietly standing on the first floor greeted us, I lightly

nodded and when I headed to the second floor, I saw a pretty large space.

“There’s a lot of empty rooms, so feel free to pick one,” she said.

“Okay.”

I expected it after seeing the size of the first floor, but the second floor that we were using was also very big. The halls were wide and there were a lot of rooms. Since the number of members in our party was small, the space looked a bit bigger.

The inside of the room wasn’t that bad either. The bed was big for one person to use, there was a desk and a chair and a basic bookshelf, making the room look empty, but when I recalled the fact that we were all going to use it, I started to feel better.

“Oppa…” Jung Ha-Yan called out.

She lightly pulled my sleeve and leaned her body against mine as if she was telling me that she wanted something, but I didn’t even think about sharing a room with her. But pretending not to notice was a lot of work too.

“Hey, since there’s a lot of rooms… I think we can just use three, Miss sub guild master,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“…”

“Bro and I will get separate rooms. Noonim and hyung-nim can share a room…” he said.

‘This pig… ’

“Oh… it’s fine if you want to do that, but…” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“Ahem… more than that, I think the room right next door will be better,” I said.

“Okay, whatever makes you feel comfortable,” she said.

It was a strange war of nerves.

There was a moment of disappointment on their faces, but I didn’t think that they honestly meant what they said. In the end, Jung Ha-Yan took the room that was next

to mine. Both Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu decided to use the rooms across from ours. I was a bit worried because Jung Ha-Yan's room was right next to mine, but she must be happy because she kept a bright smile on her face. I was sure that it would be better than before when she discreetly lay down next to me back then after everyone fell asleep, but I thought about the possibility of her creating a hole in the wall as well.

"The practice room and the training ground are behind the building. You won't have your own practice room, but we prepared a joint training ground for party seven. If you want to use the practice room by yourself, you can use it after registering beforehand in the lobby," Lee Sang-Hee explained.

"Oh… I see," I said.

"And Mr. Ki-Young…"

"Yes?"

"I've prepared a separate room for you," she said.

"A separate room?" I asked.

"Please follow me."

"Okay."

As I followed her, I noticed that she was in a good mood. Park Deok-Gu, Jung Ha-Yan, and Kim Hyun-Sung must have been curious because they were following us.

When we entered the room that was located at the very end of the second-floor hallway, I unknowingly opened my mouth. This was the first time that I had such a reaction after arriving in Lindel.

"You can work here from now on," she said.

"Woah…"

"Wow…"

There were books stacked on one side, but what caught my attention the most was

the alchemy equipment that filled the room. Not only were there modern tools like beakers and flasks, but the basic alchemy tools that I knew of were all here. On one of the side room, there were catalysts and a variety of ingredients. The alchemy jar that had a magic seal installed also caught my attention. The majority of the goods that Cha Hee-Ra gifted were organized here and the Ancient Republic's Potion Making Alchemy Kit was also placed on one side.

Simply put, this place was…

"The alchemy workshop that you'll be using," Lee Sang-He said.

"Oh."

"I honestly wanted to make the room bigger, but this was my first time preparing a room like this for a non-combatant job…" she said.

"It's fine… this is enough," I told her.

"I heard that impurities shouldn't be mixed in during an experiment, so I installed artifacts all over the room that contain sterilization magic. It's at the end of the room and another artifact was installed to make the ventilation easier, so I'm sure it'll be comfortable for you to use. Unknown accidents may occur, so shield magic has also been installed," she explained.

"Thank you," I said.

Honestly, it felt strange because even when I was on Earth, I never had my own space.

"It feels like a laboratory that scientists use. Wow…" Park Deok-Gu commented.

"It's really nice, oppa," Jung Ha-Yan said.

To be frank, the gifts that I received from Cha Hee-Ra were more valuable than all the equipment that were in here combined, but I didn't feel like I was being treated poorly. It was to the point that I wanted to see how many of the alchemists that arrived into this world started off with this good of a treatment.

There were epic-ranked books and an alchemy kit, a decent workshop that the guild itself provided, and the many ingredients and catalysts that were provided by the

owner of a large guild. If I didn't show any results despite receiving this much support, I wouldn't have anything to say even if they called me an idiot. After all, I was given an environment where I could do whatever I wanted.

From the beginning, alchemists were known to be inefficient because not only did they use a lot of gold, but compared to magic, the results weren't that great. Before obtaining a skill, the amount of investment was the problem, but that didn't apply to me. In this kind of condition, I could make whatever I wanted.

"Hyung-nim! How about we go and eat…"

"No, you eat first Deok-Gu," I said, cutting him off.

"Huh?"

"There are a few things that I want to test out, so go eat with Ha-Yan first," I said.

Park Deok-Gu looked kind of disappointed and Lee Sang-Hee was looking at me like a son that was studying hard. Of course, a mother would be happy to see her son being so enthusiastic about studying. She basically provided me with workbooks and my very own study room. As the *son*, it was my obligation to do my best.

Honestly, it wouldn't really matter if I rested for a day, but there were so many things that I wanted to test out right now. After obtaining the alchemist job, I finally got the opportunity to test out the things that were in my head.

"Ugh…"

"I was thinking about having a simple dinner with everyone, but I guess I'll have to push it back and since the other parties are outside, I think that would be better. If there's anything you need, you can go to the lobby on the first floor. Well then, I'll be heading out. The other facilities within the guild that I haven't explained today will be explained at a later time," she said.

The way she smiled so brightly was cute.

"Ugh, I think I need to go train as well. After we organize our stuff… what are you going to do noonim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I-I also have… some studying to do…" she answered.

“And you dude?”

“I think I should look around the city,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“Huh?”

“I’m curious as to what’s around here. I’m also going to visit the temple as well as the slums,” he explained.

‘This bastard… ’

I was worried that he would do some charity work when he reached the slums and since it was him, it was definitely possible. But when I recalled his actions last time, I confirmed that he wasn’t a complete idiot, so I decided to trust him this time.

“Also…”

“Yes?”

“I noticed a lot of people gathered when we were at the square earlier,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Well, it seems like a majority of them were looking for people to join their party…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Ah.”

“Well, I’ll go see if there’s anyone that’s willing to join our party,” he said.

That was when I realized what he was thinking all this time.

‘They’re here.’

The slums or the temple. I wasn’t sure which one it was, but the five members that our regressor had been keeping an eye on were within this city.

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1. Disclaimer: All characters’ attitudes or opinions are purely for plot purpose and does not reflect the opinions of the author, translator, or publishers. ☜

CHAPTER 52
BEING POOR DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NICE (1)

[You have discovered a new recipe.]

[You'll succeed in producing basic stamina potion.]

[Your intelligence will increase by one point.]

[Combining Poisoned Herb and Troll's Blood. You have successfully created a new catalyst combination.]

[Your intelligence will increase by one point.]

[Combining Poisoned Herb and the Essence of Magic. You have successfully created a new catalyst combination.]

[Combining Poisoned Herb and Orc's Molar. You have failed to create a new catalyst combination.]

Being an alchemist wasn't difficult, but it didn't mean that skills weren't used at all. The timing to use an alchemy magic circle, the type of magic circle that varied based on the catalyst ingredients, the amount of mana required to create a magic circle, and the synergy of catalysts and ingredients. I need to go about it while thinking about those things, so this was very much like an experiment. An experiment with a high risk of failure. This was why an alchemist had to be cautious.

Most alchemists knew that the ingredients themselves were very expensive. Thus, every piece of gold mattered when they had to spend it. They first had to come up with several hypotheses after digging deep into potion-making and the theory of catalyst combination. Based on those hypotheses, virtual experiments could then be conducted. Afterward, the actual experiment could then be done based on the results of the virtual experiments.

Of course, it didn't apply to me.

Why?

"Because I have a lot of money."

I didn't even bother doing virtual experiments. I continued with the catalyst combination and potion-making. I didn't bother with the theory or hypothesis and only focused on the results of the experiment. After getting results through the experiment first, I thought about how I got this result. Compared to the other alchemists, of course, mine was more effective since those alchemists prepared themselves for a month while shuddering at the sight of one rare-ranked catalyst.

[You have failed.]

[You have failed.]

[You have failed.]

'Does it not work?'

I didn't waste time trying to find the reason because I just needed to change the method a bit.

[You have succeeded.]

I was reaching the peak of prodigality. In the past week, I was sure that I spent about 1,000 gold, but it wasn't like I didn't obtain anything. There weren't immediate results, but I already memorized the potion recipes that were being sold in the market, but more than that, I was able to increase my intelligence and magic stats. Simply put, I bought my stats using gold.

When I was about to pour gold into the alchemy kit again, I heard a voice from outside.

“Hyung-nim!” Park Deok-Gu called out.

“Yeah, come in. Don’t forget to disinfect using the artifact…” I said.

“Got it,” he replied.

When the door slightly opened, of course, Park Deok-Gu was the one that I saw and Jung Ha-Yan was next to him. When I saw the handful of packages they were carrying, I had an idea as to why they came here.

“Why did you bother coming here? The other normal guild members promised to help me with the package. I even told the receptionist in the lobby, so you don’t have to move them yourself,” I explained.

“Ugh, we’re doing this because if we don’t do this at least, then seeing your face won’t be easy. I don't understand how despite living in the same house, it’s so difficult to see your face. Can I place the packages here?” he asked.

“Just leave it anywhere. Thanks, Deok-Gu,” I said.

“Hehe, this is nothing,” he said.

“O-Oppa, have you eaten yet?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“Oh.”

When I looked at the time, I noticed that a lot of time had passed. I was so focused that I forgot the passage of time.

“I-I made something…” she said.

“Oh, then let’s eat it together,” I suggested.

“Yes!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

I couldn’t help but smile after seeing the overly excited Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan.

When I glanced over at the packages, the items that I ordered had arrived correctly.

“By the way, what are you planning on using all the items that you ordered for?” he asked.

“They’re all catalysts that are going to be used for alchemy,” I answered.

“Wow, this is the potion that you made… can you save a dying person hyung-nim?” he asked.

“It can’t, but it can heal ordinary wounds. Oh, Ha-Yan, don’t touch the items that are over there and don’t think about drinking them either,” I told her.

“Oh… okay!” she answered.

“I don’t know much about this stuff, but I know you’re trying to do something amazing, hyung-nim. But, what are you trying to make?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Well… first…”

“Yeah?”

“Something that’ll make money,” I replied.

I noticed that both Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan looked slightly absent-minded and it was to the point that I started laughing, but it wasn’t something that I thought about out of the blue. Like I said, money was the most important to me because it was natural for me to have an income based on the amount of money I spend. The amount I made had to be just as much as my investment. Simply put, I would become Kim Hyun-Sung party’s financier.

Of course, I had to show results so that Cha Hee-Ra would keep investing in me. I did provide her with the list of names, but I had to keep showing her that I was useful.

What I was making was a secret and there wasn’t a reason for Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan to know.

“By the way, what is Mr. Hyun-Sung up to lately?” I asked.

“Now that I think about it, it has been a while since I’ve seen him,” Jung Ha-Yan

answered.

“Well, he’s like you hyung-nim. We do train together at the practice sites, but once we are done training, he runs towards the slums. He even packs a bunch of food,” Park Deok-Gu answered.

“What?”

“I mean, I knew he was a kind-hearted dude, but there isn’t an angel like him. I’m not sure if he’s doing some kind of charity work, but it’s already been a week since he’s been doing that… ahem, well, I do respect him for that though,” he explained.

“Really? Every day?” I asked.

“It seems like it. Oh! I also heard him talk about a new dungeon or something… anyways, the way he walks around the city makes it seem as if he’s looking for someone or gathering information… one thing that I’m sure of is that bro, Kim Hyun-Sung is a really nice guy,” he said.

‘Charity work?’

It did fit him.

I thought that maybe he was going to bring a new talented member that he knew of, but it was taking longer than I thought. Seeing as how he constantly visited the slums, it seemed like something was there, but I guess it wasn’t really working out. If he was able to recruit them right away, then there wouldn’t be a reason for him to continue doing charity work over there.

“I’m not sure how much he thinks about the people there, but when I see him frowning, I guess there’s a lot of things that he’s worried about,” Park Deok-Gu said.

‘What is it?’

Maybe there was a problem.

‘Should I visit him?’

It wasn’t a bad idea. I was in the final stage of the products that I was making and I was also curious about the kind of talent and nature that our future comrade would

have. Of course, I also had to know more about them since I had to become close with them.

When I took a bite of the food that Jung Ha-Yan made, I noticed her happy face.

“I should try going there too…” I said.

“Huh? Really?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I’m a bit curious and I’m also curious about what the slums are like…” I replied.

“I-I want to go too, oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“You want to?” I asked.

“Y-Yes!” she answered.

Park Deok-Gu looked like he wanted to go, but he seemed like he didn’t want to be the third wheel. Rather, he probably thought that he should quickly leave as I saw him quickly finish his food.

“Should we go now, Ha-Yan?” I asked.

“Okay!” she answered.

It was good to put thoughts into action right away.

It only took a moment for me and Jung Ha-Yan to leave the guild together.

I had gotten used to the sights that I found interesting at first and even though I had never been outside of the square, I think we had to walk for a while. I wanted to hurry up, so when I got on a carriage, I grabbed Jung Ha-Yan’s hand and saw her pleased and joyful expression. It felt like we were on a city tour and the scenery that was passing by was fun to watch.

The slower the carriage started to move, the more the atmosphere changed. It went from a bright, clean atmosphere to a dark and dirty one and even the coachman that was driving the carriage wore a dark look. I think he was thinking that it was either kind of humid or maybe the air itself was unpleasant.

More than that, what made the people here different from the people in the western region were their appearance and expression.

“What brings you all the way here?” the coachman asked.

“Nothing special. It hasn’t been that long since I entered the city, so I am just curious to see what this place is like,” I answered.

“Oh, I guess you got an offer with good terms from a guild,” he said.

“Haha, it’s embarrassing, but that’s right,” I said.

It felt like I was looking at a typical failure because not only were they walking with their heads down, but they looked nervous, as if they were afraid that they were going to cause us harm. They didn’t have the confidence to go out to hunt and joining a guild or clan was scary for them. I didn’t know what each and every person’s reason was for coming and settling down here, but I knew that the place didn’t have a positive atmosphere at the least.

“The atmosphere is a bit different from the western square, oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Yeah, I agree,” I said.

I felt dumb for being worried that it could be dangerous.

The way we rode the carriage around the slums made us look like an upper-class couple in this area. The people here neither had the stamina nor the tenacity to cause us harm and all they did was tussle with each other.

The situation was the same even after we got off the carriage. I guess they were even scared of begging because they stood far from us and were wary of me and Jung Ha-Yan. That was when I noticed people gathering. Among the people that were wearing scruffy clothes, there was one woman who looked clean.

[Checking Player Sun Hee-Young’s Status Window and Stats.]

[Name - Sun Hee-Young]

[Title - Saint of the Forsaken]

[Age - 32]

[Nature - Ideal Volunteer]

[Job - Priest of the Sun - Epic Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic holy power knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate holy power knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 30/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 28/Above average growth limit]

[Stamina - 30/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 45/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 32/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 45/Above epic growth limit]

[Holy - 69/Above legendary growth limit]

[Gear]

[None]

[Attribute - Saint's Prayer]

[Overall Review - It's not an exaggeration to say that Player Sun Hee-Young was born to be a priest. The difference between you and Sun Hee-Young is very distinct since

you have a shitty personality. Don't even think about approaching her. She's too pure to be contaminated by you.]

'Wow… '

After ignoring the overall review that I was now used to, I looked at the woman's stats again.

'Damn… '

Unless I had holes in my eyes, I was sure she was the one.

The legendary ranked holy stat…

She looked like she had been here for a while, but for some reason, her potential reminded me of Jung Ha-Yan.

Although I didn't see Kim Hyun-Sung, I could see the others gathered around that woman. They weren't vagrants since they had the same clean appearance as her. They didn't seem like they were in the same guild either because their clothes and flags were different.

One thing I was sure of was that they gathered with that woman named Sun Hee-Young in the center and was buttering up to her. It was pretty obvious.

'Recruitment war?'

I was certain of it.

I guess the talented person that Kim Hyun-Sung wanted to recruit was someone that others knew as well. A talented person that everyone wanted and had a guaranteed future. Despite that, she wasn't affiliated with any guilds.

I realized why Kim Hyun-Sung visited this place often and why the recruiters of other guilds gathered here when they had nothing to do with charity work.

They were all busy pretending to be nice and the way they did volunteer work in order to catch her attention was a sight to see.

'Saint of the Forsaken?'

They looked nothing more than pushovers of lazy bastards that didn't like to work and it was to the point that I unknowingly mumbled to myself.

If there was one thing that I didn't expect, it was Jung Ha-Yan who was trying to be positive about my opinion.

"They're lazy bastards."

"I agree, oppa. T-They do… look like lazy bastards!"

I guess she felt anxious about how we stopped talking for a moment that she released a desperate cry of affirmation. Compared to my quiet voice, Jung Ha-Yan's voice was a bit loud, which caused everyone to look at us.

'Damn it… '

CHAPTER 53
BEING POOR DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NICE (2)

I had an idea of what they thought about me and Jung Ha-Yan because our outer appearance looked totally different from the locals of this place. Unlike the people here who couldn't wash themselves up properly, Jung Ha-Yan was clean. In addition, she was also wearing makeup and on top of that, she was wearing pretty clothes. Also, we weren't doing charity work like the people that were looking at us, so simply put, we looked like an immature young couple that came out for a stroll in the slums. I wouldn't have anything to say even if there was a riot, but the extreme situation where the poor threw rocks at us didn't happen.

Wearing a neat outfit in the free city of Lindel either meant that they had a strong force, had power, or possessed a lot of gold.

I was sure that they were thinking about the situation where we might express our anger towards them, but that didn't mean they weren't feeling hostile towards us.

'Damn it… '

It was none of my business as to how they were looking at me, but the fact that the woman named Sun Hee-Young, who was potentially the person that Kim Hyun-Sung had his eyes on, was staring at us wasn't a good thing.

Jung Ha-Yan must have realized that she made a mistake after she saw my expression.

In the end, Sun Hee-Young walked through the poor people and started walking towards me. I wasn't sure if this was the proper expression, but she gave off a church noona-like impression. She had long hair, large eyes, and an appearance that made her look like she had never suffered a day in her life.

I avoided her gaze and before I had the chance to organize my thoughts on how I should fix this issue, Sun Hee-Young immediately opened her mouth. "Please apologize to them."

"…"

"Please take back the abusive language you used on them and apologize. No one here deserves to hear that kind of language from you two," she said.

Even the clan recruiters that were buttering up to this woman raised their voices and it was to the point that I wanted to laugh at this ridiculous situation.

"I don't know where you two are from, but it would be best to apologize."

"We'd appreciate it if you took back the abusive words you just said."

"Are you from the Blue Guild?"

They didn't look like they were from the Red Mercenary Guild or a large guild. The others that were from small to mid-sized clans were more respectful than I thought. I guess the blue insignia that was on my chest calmed them down.

I could understand why this woman said what she said, but I found it too ridiculous when the people from the other clans and guilds said what they said.

'Selfish and ambitious person.'

'Calculative analyst.'

No matter how I looked at it, I saw men that were far from doing volunteer work in here. The worse their nature was, the louder their voices were.

Anyone could see that they were on the side of justice while we were the unrefined couple. Moreover, we were in a situation where there was a clear distinction between who was the good guy and the bad guy.

'Mistake?'

No, I couldn't call it a mistake.

I wasn't sure when the recruitment war started and how much progress Kim Hyun-Sung had made so far in trying to recruit that woman, but I was sure that he wasn't able to make a proper recruitment offer when there was so much competition, to begin with. I was sure that this didn't happen recently and I could imagine the entire

situation in my head.

To that woman, helping the poor people was her top priority and since she was persistent on that, she wouldn't be able to go on expeditions after joining a clan or a guild. It only took a moment for me to come up with a totally new method that would fit that woman. Jung Ha-Yan looked slightly discouraged, so I lightly pulled her shoulder towards me and then spoke. "I won't take it back."

"E-Excuse… me?"

"I said that I won't take it back," I repeated.

"What do you…"

"I don't think I made a mistake by calling them lazy bastards when all they don't do anything and just accept what others are giving them," I explained.

"What are you talking about right now? You're… part of the Blue Guild," she said.

"What I say has nothing to do with the guild I'm affiliated with, so whether I'm part of the Blue Guild or not isn't important. This is totally my own opinion and has nothing to do with the guild," I said.

"There are things you should say and things you shouldn't say. You don't know anything about this place. Just because you wear nice clothes and are at a good place, you don't have the right to criticize them," Sun Hee-Young said.

When I remained quiet for a moment, she must have felt proud because she continued talking. "No one is here because they like it. They all have their own reasons and that's why they are in a corner. In this continent, the smallest mistake can cost your life. Of course, a person like you wouldn't understand since you were contacted by a guild for your special talent and are living an easy life," she explained.

When she mentioned me having a special talent, I almost laughed but I slightly frowned when she said that I was living an easy life.

"That's funny," I said.

"Sorry?"

“It hasn’t been that long since I arrived here, but I’m sure I lived 10 times more fiercely than them and I’m sure it’s the same for everyone here and the clan people that are over there. Not only did I hunt with my life on the line, but I did dirty work and difficult tasks without nitpicking about it to get to my current position. There isn’t a person alive that wants to die and at the same time, no one wants to work,” I explained.

“Oh…”

“It’s the same for me. I was able to join the Blue Guild after overcoming the risk of dying a few times and I’m sure those people have never put anything on the line for their lives,” I said.

“That’s not true. They…”

“I have an idea,” I said, interrupting her.

“…”

“I think I have an idea as to how they became that way,” I said.

“What are you saying?” she asked.

“You’re the one that made them that way,” I answered.

She was looking at me as if what I said was bullshit, but when thinking about it objectively, I wasn’t wrong.

“You’re the one that made them that way. You gave them food, a roof over their heads, and clothes, which made them like that. You’ve turned them into failures,” I explained.

“How can you say that when… you don’t know anything. You said that you recently arrived here. You don’t know the city’s… current situation, so when you talk like that… I’m not the reason why these poor people exist… i-it’s because of people like you,” she said.

I didn’t know the details, but I knew very well about those types of people.

“Ahhh, you’re referring to the hard-working people,” I said.

“I’m not talking about the hard-working people. The people that look down on the people that are under them, despise others, and only think about their personal gains are what’s causing Lindel to rot,” Sun Hee-Young said.

She wasn’t wrong, but I couldn’t agree with her.

“I’ve never burdened others for my own benefit. Of course, some people may feel that way, but… I don’t really understand what you said just now. The people that you need to help aren’t these people. It’s the adventurers that have consistently put their lives on the line when going on expeditions, as well as the laborers that work in difficult environments,” I explained.

It was sophistry. It was definitely sophistry and it might sound like bullshit to her.

Obviously, I wasn’t dissatisfied with the volunteer work itself and on the contrary, I personally respected people that did that, but this woman’s method was wrong.

Nature.

‘Ideal volunteer?’

She could be the type to volunteer for the sake of volunteering.

“I think I understand what you’re saying. You’re saying that I shouldn’t give them the fish, but to teach them… how to fish. Still, you don’t have the right to say something like that when you’re not even doing anything. Your words aren’t convincing… when you’re not doing anything for these people,” she said.

“I came here to do something for them,” I told her.

“What…”

I spoke with a smirk on my face.

“I’ll hire every person that’s here,” I said.

“Excuse me?”

“I’ll hire every person that’s here and they won’t be doing anything dangerous, but the work may be difficult. You don’t have to worry so much because it’s something a

person can do as long as they're able to move. I'll even pay them more than the minimum wage," I said.

"Oh…"

"It's an opportunity for them to escape their current situation and restore what they had. I may not be able to provide lodging, but I can provide them lunch," I said.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

"It's up to you guys whether you want to continue living life by mooching off others or if you want to live as a confident member of society. It's time for all of you to stand up by yourselves," I said.

I started looking around quietly. It was quiet, but someone was courageous enough to start asking questions.

"Could we know what kind of job it is?"

"As I said, It's a simple job that's not dangerous, but I can't promise you that it won't be dangerous at all. You can think of it as simple labor," I answered.

"The pay…"

"I'll pay you one gold. If there's additional work, I'll pay you separately for it. I think it would be best to set the working hours to eight hours per day," I said.

I heard people murmuring.

"If you don't believe me, then I'll invite this person back to the guild and make her an advisor so that all of you will feel reassured," I suggested.

"I never agreed to do it!" Sun Hee-Young yelled.

"Shouldn't you keep an eye on me to see what I will do?" I asked.

"T-That's true, but…"

"This is an opportunity for all of you. It's work that even people with disabilities can do. Yes, it's true," I said.

I was sure that telling them that I was going to bring Sun Hee-Young as the guild's advisor helped them with their decision because people started to raise their hands slowly.

"I'll do it."

"I-I'll do it too."

"Me too…"

"I-I'll do my best if you give me the chance."

I felt really happy when I saw them raise their hands. When I noticed the shocked expressions on the clan members' faces as well as Sun Hee-Young's, I was happier.

"You'll immediately start working tomorrow and since it's a simple work, you just have to arrive tomorrow morning by nine o'clock," I said.

"Okay," they answered.

I guess Sun Hee-Young was embarrassed about what she said earlier, but she looked as if she didn't believe me completely. Honestly, it didn't matter whether she believed me or not.

Jung Ha-Yan was a bit wary of Sun Hee-Young, so when I patted her head and then turned around, Sun Hee-Young quietly came up to me and spoke slowly. "I-I don't know… what to say, but… t-thank you. But…"

"I don't understand what you're thanking me for," I told her.

"Excuse me?"

"You don't need to thank me, because."

"…"

"It won't really change anything," I said.

"What are you…"

“I’m sure I told you earlier.”

“What?”

“You’re the one that made them that way,” I said.

It didn’t matter whether those people were accustomed to Sun Hee-Young or not because they were going to think that *way* anyway.

CHAPTER 54
BEING POOR DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NICE (3)

"What are you thinking?"

"Nothing special. I just wanted to show you that I was right," I answered.

"You do look rich. I can't believe you hired all of those people just for that reason…" Sun Hee-Young said.

I couldn't help but smile.

'I have no money… '

Honestly, hiring all of these people at once was definitely an issue because I currently didn't have enough catalysts for alchemy. Of course, I didn't have any gold just lying around, but it wasn't like those people were completely useless to me.

It was my chance to do clinical trials at a really cheap price and it was also my chance to destroy Sun Hee-Young's thoughts, so doing this was beneficial in many ways. Methods on how to break that mindset of hers were simple and I thought that this was a way to make this woman join the guild.

'It has been three years since she entered this place. It has been two years since she became the Saint of the Forsaken. She started by being affiliated with the temple instead of a clan or guild and after leaving the temple, she constantly focused on volunteer work. Sun Hee-Young has been rejecting every offer she has received from large guilds and small to mid-sized clans.'

That was her fancy resume. Despite having the chance to become an elite player like me, her reasoning for joining the temple caught my attention. And the reason why she rejected offers from clans or guilds was really simple.

Why?

Because the Saint of the Forsaken had an enormous mission to save the people in the

slums and that was why she rejected the offers from guilds and clans for two years.

Although I was sure that she got an offer that was beyond my imagination, I was also sure that within the conditions, officially saving the people in the slums was included, but despite that, the reason why she rejected them was obvious. It was because she believed that she had to do it herself.

Of course, I had no idea why she was interested in these people. Honestly, I didn't care nor was there any reason for me to know why she was interested in them because the most important thing right now was shifting her priorities away from them. Simply put, my first task was to get her away from the people of the slums.

When I glanced ahead, I saw people working hard and there were a few people that looked quite ambitious. It was to the point where I thought maybe my plan was going to fail, but I didn't bother to worry about it.

"There are still people in the slums that still haven't obtained jobs yet… are you not going to visit them?" I asked

"I'm going to visit them eventually when the time comes, but not right now. I have to keep an eye out to see what you're up to," she answered.

"I'm not up to anything. It's just simple labor like moving rocks. It may get hot because of the sun, but for them, I'm sure every drop of their sweat is worth it since they haven't shed sweat for a while now. Seeing them feel the true value of work makes me want to move the rocks with them," I said.

"It sounds like you're mocking them," she said.

"You're misunderstanding me," I told her.

Obviously, she wasn't going to see me in a good light because if I were in her shoes, I would have done the same thing since I was the one that contradicted her worth. But the situation wasn't that bad. The method that I used to approach her was effective and must have left a deep impression on her since it was different from how others approached her.

"What did you mean when you said that I made them that way?" Sun Hee-Young asked.

“It’s exactly like I said. They just don’t want to work, not that they can’t work,” I answered.

“I guess you’re not able to see the people that are working right now,” she commented.

“I can see them well. I can see them very well, but did you know?” I asked.

“What…”

“Within the free city of Lindel, there are many jobs like this,” I replied.

‘Even though they’re a bit dangerous.’

“Of course, I can’t deny the fact that working with me has better benefits, but… there are a lot of similar jobs. The eastern regions are currently being developed and the Red Mercenary Guild is about to build a magic tower soon. They must be looking for handymen and the likes. Not only that, but did you know that the guilds have started a large-scale construction near the tutorial dungeon? I’m sure those people have heard the news as well,” I explained.

“…”

“Yesterday, I encouraged them to work a little bit more. I’m sure they want to prove that they’re not lazy bastards or maybe they want to show the Saint of the Forsaken, who has been watching them, that they have changed. Yes, I’m sure that’s it,” I said.

“That’s…”

“They have been instigated, but I’m sure they’re unaware of that because I led them to think in a positive direction instead of in a negative direction. Well, I’m sure this won’t last long anyway,” I said, interrupting her.

“What…”

“Human’s nature doesn’t change that easily, and that’s why they’re so ambitious right now and I can see that. I can see their positive energy, but it probably won’t last a month. Rather than working hard under the hot sun, I’m sure they’ll miss the times when they were able to wander around the slums. The time will come when they’ll miss the shelter you provided for them because there isn’t a person alive that wants

to feel the pain that makes them run out of breath," I explained.

"I understand very well what you're thinking, but nothing that you said was right. Humans are more than capable of changing," she said.

"Then how about the deduction that the Saint of the Forsaken was the one that changed them? You've turned ordinary people into animals that just take things for themselves," I told her.

"You!"

'Was I too harsh?'

I saw Sun Hee-Young trembling and I guess she wanted to slap me because I noticed her biting down her lips. Even her big eyes were filled with tears. I thought that maybe I pushed a girl that didn't know anything too far, but then I thought that this level of provocation was necessary. Despite believing that what I said was wrong, I was sure that she was unable to erase the doubts that were in her mind.

'What if what that man said was correct?'

This doubt may be small but it would surely destroy this woman who found value in helping others. After all, it seemed that the so-called Saint of the Forsaken was too currently too weak.

"It's not going to work out as you think. Thinking that those people are moving because of you is nothing but pride and self-righteousness. The world will never go the way you want," she said.

"I wonder…"

"E-Even if you're right… in my eyes, those people are a lot more valuable than you," she said.

"Is there a reason why you think that way?" I asked.

"I can see it very clearly without having to find a reason," she answered.

"…Have you heard of the underdog effect?" I asked.

"…"

"It's a word that refers to the basic error of distinguishing the good people from evil based on their difference in power, Saint of the Forsaken," I answered.

"…"

"Being poor doesn't necessarily mean that they're nice," I commented.

"…"

"Those people may be innocent and nice in front of you and I'm sure they're going to play the victims of this society's system when they're in front of you, however, they're also assailants in some parts. The slum isn't a place like heaven where angels live. It's part of the same society that we're living in. Yes, society. A society where all types of dirty deeds and unbelievable things are common," I said.

"Society isn't like what you think…"

"It's rotten because there's bound to be conflict where humans are. If you don't believe me, I would like to recommend a small test," I said.

"What…"

"You try to become a poor person yourself. Try living on the same level as them and not as the saint that saves them, then I'm sure you'll experience something. One week? No, I'm sure a day will be more than enough," I suggested.

"I can't…"

"I know what you're worried about. I'm sure you're worried about the people that'll starve because you're not there, but one day is fine. You even have nice friends that are doing volunteer work while following you around," I explained.

'Although, I'm sure that they won't show up if you're not there.'

It was obvious, but if the saint wasn't there, then there wasn't a reason for them to visit the slum.

With a smirk on my face, I spoke softly. "Are you not confident?"

“That’s… not it,” Sun Hee-Young said.

“I’ll make the preparations, so you can just think of it as getting experience as the poor,” I told her.

“You’re really… disgusting,” she commented.

“You just have to agree if you’re confident,” I said.

“It’s not a matter of whether I’m confident or not. They’re not animals at a zoo. You!”

“Do you agree or not? If our saint agrees then I might want to start doing volunteer work because I’m impressed by your determination. It’s your chance to help the poor, so agreeing to it is the right thing to do,” I explained.

“You’re going to regret this,” she warned.

“Who knows? I think you’re going to be the one that’s going to regret it, not me,” I told her.

The way she bit her lips and turned around to leave was a sight to see.

‘She’s too innocent… ’

We weren’t even on Earth, so being able to maintain that innocence even after coming here was a blessing in itself. I was sure that she would do her best to prove that she was right, but after thinking about the harsh realities that she was going to wake up to, I couldn’t help but laugh.

When I turned my head again and looked towards the front, I saw the people working hard. I noticed them putting all their energy into the moving rocks, which were meaningless.

“Hey! You!”

“I don’t think we can move this…”

“We can do it if we do it together.”

“Okay.”

“Hey, Mr. Kim! Come over here quickly!”

“I’ll go after I finish this!”

‘It’s heartwarming.’

When Sun Hee-Young disappeared from my sight, I saw Jung Ha-Yan running towards me. She looked a bit anxious, but she seemed like she was feeling better when I lightly hugged her. Seeing her holding her notebook made me think that she was working hard on her task.

“Oppa,” she called out.

“Have you been practicing?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

“Let’s hear it then,” I said.

“Okay! S-So.”

“Mhm.”

“The 13th experimental subject seemed a bit lethargic and the 25th looked angry… the seventh and eighth looked like they were working hard,” she said.

“I heard some noise from inside a moment ago,” I said.

“That was the 56th and 75th experimental subject. I think that there has been an issue while they were working, but… I-I don’t have the details… I’m sorry,” she said.

“No, just mentioning that there was an issue is enough. How’s the 38th subject?” I asked.

“Oh, they seem to be moving a bit lazily… they also seem to be resting little by little in places where they can’t be seen. A-And… they also mentioned that they wanted to quit. 93rd and 95th agreed to 38th’s words as well,” Jung Ha-Yan explained.

“Ahh, I see. The result isn’t bad,” I said.

“Mhm.”

“Good job, Ha-Yan. This is my ‘thank you’ present,” I said.

“O-Oppa,” she said.

“Also, I’m just wondering, but… are you able to use a spell that can change one’s outer appearance?” I asked.

“That’s…”

“Changing it slightly using magic should be fine. Kind of like illusion magic. Is it difficult?”

“Oh! I think I can do that much. But why…” she asked.

That was because…

“There’s a princess that doesn’t know anything about the world and I need to show her just how dirty the world is,” I explained.

I noticed Jung Ha-Yan’s bright smile.

“Yes, you’re right,” she said in agreement.

CHAPTER 55
BEING POOR DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NICE (4)

Just recalling his face made my hands and feet tremble for some reason. It wasn't because I was angry. I simply had a difficult time understanding him.

'I didn't do anything wrong.'

Helping people was a very natural thing to do, yes, very natural.

'He doesn't know anything.'

No one ended up in the slums because they wanted to. Everyone here had their own stories to tell. There were people that didn't get contacted by a guild or a clan and there were others that became disabled after hunting so they had no choice but to come here. There were also people that were thrown out into the streets because of a sick family member and there were others that couldn't get a job. Simply put, it was society that led them to the streets. It was Lindel, no, the Holy Empire, no, this entire continent's fault. It was a society that didn't know how to care for the weak and was nothing more than a selfish society. They offered welfare benefits, but the people in the slums couldn't take advantage of them. Since this continent only moved based on the people's self-interest, someone had to step up and help these people.

"It's going to be dangerous," the man said.

"No, it won't be dangerous," I said.

"Well, regardless of what you think, it's up to you, miss, but it would be best to at least prepare safety devices since we won't know when and what kind of issues will occur," he said.

"What makes you think that?" I asked.

"I actually want to ask you why you didn't think about that," he replied.

"The reason why you don't understand me is that you're not looking at the real

them," I told him.

"My answer is the same. The one that's not looking at the real them is you, miss. They're not simply poor and needy people. The ones that actually need help are those that are trying to better themselves, not the people that are lazily lying around doing nothing," he explained.

"I don't want to hear your lies anymore," I told them.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sure it sounds like a lie to you. Go figure," he said sarcastically.

"Well then, I'll take my leave now. I hope you'll keep your promise," I said.

"Your wish is my command. Please have a safe trip," he said.

It wasn't even worth answering, no, even if I go to the slum while looking like this, it wasn't going to change anything. Actually, it wasn't necessary for me to agree to this kind of silly proposal, but despite that, there was one reason why I decided to enter the slum alone.

'I wasn't wrong.'

Because I wanted to prove that I wasn't wrong and I wanted to prove that he was wrong. There was a difference between watching them from afar and actually spending time with them. They were all innocent people. There was an old couple that cried and thanked me even though I didn't do much to help them and there was even a child that picked a flower and gave it to me as a way of repaying me. For two years, I have seen many things that the man must have never seen since I spent a lot of time talking and being with them.

'He was only able to say those things because he has never seen the real them.'

When I started walking, I felt the atmosphere getting darker and even though I came here every day, it felt slightly unfamiliar. Despite the fact that it was time to eat, seeing as how I didn't see the people that usually volunteered with me, I guess something came up and that was why they weren't here.

This place had always been the same. There was a really bad stench, but I am already used to it. Maybe it was because I have gotten used to it compared to the first time because I was able to walk around without any issues. When I looked around me, I

saw some people lying down lazily like always, people talking amongst themselves and others looking towards a different region. I also saw people taking care of children and couples that walked around arm-in-arm.

That man was right. This was also a place where people lived. A place where very ordinary people lived. There weren't any amenities, restaurants, or houses that were in good condition, but for some reason, I smiled.

'Great.'

When I walked in farther, I saw people gathered together.

'The square.'

It couldn't be seen as a proper square because it was an empty area, but once I arrived here, people naturally gathered in this area. This must be why it was called the square. Simply put, this place was symbolic because the people treated this place as their rest area. When I quietly sat down, I started seeing familiar faces.

'I'm certain.'

He was one of the men that man recruited. I wasn't sure why he was here since he was supposed to be at his workplace, but I assumed that he had his reasons.

When I was quietly looking around, I heard a loud voice. "Mr. Kim! You didn't go to work today?"

"Ahhh, I quit," Mr. Kim answered.

"What?"

"The work was really difficult. They told us to move some rocks, but I don't think I'm fit for the job," he said.

"What? Didn't you say something about starting a new life?" the man asked.

"I did have that thought for a moment, but whether I'm working hard over there or just stuffing my face in the food that woman gives us, there doesn't seem to be a big difference," Mr. Kim explained.

“If someone hears you, they’ll talk badly about you,” the man said.

“Let them. Considering the situation, I don't think she's even going to visit today… I feel like I made a fuss by saying that I was going to work. What if she doesn’t come here anymore?” Mr. Kim asked worriedly.

“I’m sure she will. She’s probably feeling sick today.”

“A priest getting sick doesn’t make sense.”

“Or it could be that time of the month. Even if she’s a priest, she can’t avoid things that happen naturally,” the man said.

“That makes sense,” Mr. Kim said in agreement.

‘Huh?’

I couldn’t understand what they were saying so I listened closely again in case I heard them wrong, but I heard them right. They were having a conversation that I couldn’t understand.

‘Oh… ’

“Ah, fuck… I’m starving… and I’m feeling sluggish…” Mr. Kim said.

“Hold on, I’ve never seen them before,” the other man said.

“Oh…”

They didn’t seem like they were referring to me specifically, but I couldn’t help but cower, so as I covered my face with my hand, I left the square. I had no idea why I ran away but I had the feeling that I must not stay there. Honestly, I no longer wanted to hear their conversation, but I didn’t have the luxury to think about different things at once.

‘You’re the one that made them that way.’

That man’s words kept repeating in my head.

As if the environment suddenly changed, I started seeing things that I couldn’t

understand and I saw sights that I had never seen before.

“I’ll give you a discount,” a woman said.

“You have a good nose for money,” the man said.

“Well, that’s because I know you followed that man… so of course, I know,” the man said.

“Hahaha.”

The couple that was walking arm-in-arm didn’t look like a couple anymore. He became a middle-aged man that was looking for prostitutes.

“This is it?” a man asked.

“I-I’m sorry,” a child said.

“You lazy bastards…”

“Ahh!” a child yelled.

As expected, the man that was with the children wasn’t taking care of them.

The streets were filled with vagrants that quenched their thirsts with rum, the majority persecuting the minority and I heard voices of men harassing women. After vomiting on the street, they would simply leave and if there were people lying on the ground complaining about their pain, people would walk past them and pretend like they didn’t see them in pain.

“Hey, you!”

I was very shocked by the curse words that I had never heard before.

‘Of course.’

These things were the same everywhere else so there was no need for me to be swayed by it. Not judging the entire situation as much as possible was the right thing to do, but I couldn’t help but gulp when a thought suddenly popped into my head.

'What if that man was right?'

What if I was the one that was wrong?

'What if what I saw was only a part of it and what he saw was the entire situation?'

What if I was the one that hadn't been looking at the *real* them all this time?

The different thoughts that I was having were making things complicated because I was seeing things that I had never seen before. When I was helping them, I had never seen these things happen around me.

'I'm sure they were assailants at some point too.'

He was right. The people that I thought were the victims were also assailants. In some places, they were the assailants.

The reason why they didn't become angry with me all this time was that I was above them and the reason why I didn't become a victim all this time was because I was wearing nice clothes and was surrounded by a group of strong players.

But the situation right now was different. This was the moment when I realized why that man said that it was going to be dangerous.

'I need to get out.'

Right now, I was also a member of this society. After gulping, I started to walk fast. "Don't move if you don't want to get stabbed."

I heard a voice behind me. Their voice felt like it was covered in phlegm, but what worried me more than that was the blade that the person was holding behind me.

"E-Excuse… me?" I asked.

"It's your first time here, right?" the man asked.

"…"

"I didn't think that I would hit a jackpot like this. You think I wouldn't notice if you wrapped yourself up with a hood like that?" he asked

“W-What… are you…”

“Are you playing dumb? Or do you really not know?” he asked.

“Please… don’t do this,” I begged him.

“You do realize how dangerous it is for you to wander around alone at night, right?” he asked.

“S-spare me…” I said.

“That depends on how much you have, so if you’re unlucky, you’ll die and if you’re lucky, you’ll live,” he said.

I had an idea about what was going on because I felt him place the blade on my back. Despite repeatedly thinking to myself that I needed to recite a spell, I couldn’t speak. The situation was very sudden and since it was my first time experiencing this, my legs were frozen. When I unknowingly collapsed to the ground, I felt him hit my head from behind.

“Kyahhhh!”

My body naturally fell to the side and before I could come back to my senses, I felt a strong grip grabbing my hair. I looked around desperately to ask for help, but the men that I saw quietly watched me as if they were enjoying it.

“H-Help… me…”

I saw familiar faces and the faces of people that showed themselves whenever I served them food. I saw them laughing together while looking my way.

I was sure that they all had their reasons and they were all innocent people, so I thought that they were definitely going to help me since I was in danger. But no one offered to help and instead, they either looked away or laughed while pointing their fingers. All of their reactions were the same.

“Please don’t do this. Please… spaaaaare!”

I felt a fist hitting my abdomen and their strong hand slapped my cheek. I felt like the inside of my mouth exploded and maybe it was because I was afraid, but I couldn’t

scream. When I activated my holy power in order to recite a spell, I saw a large fist in front of my face.

“Ahhhh!”

“…”

“Please don’t do this. Don’t… someone please help me. Please… help me,” I begged.

“There’s no point in asking the others for help since they’re all like me,” the man said.

“T-That’s… not true,” I said.

“And you came here despite knowing that? And by yourself? Ha! Are you asking us to devour you or something?” the man asked sarcastically.

It only took me a moment to realize that the man was referring to the western part of the square, not the slums. I had a difficult time understanding why this was the area that I must not enter because whenever I came here to volunteer, I always walked through here. Before I could organize my thoughts, however, I saw a large face in front of me.

“Damn it, you’re broke,” the man said.

A part of his face was burned off, making it look like parts of his face were rotten. The foul smell from his mouth and body was so bad that it was nauseating.

“Ugh.”

“Lady, am I nauseating?” the man asked.

“N-No,” I answered.

My head turned again. Before I could feel pain on my left cheek, I felt his strong hand choking me. While I was having a difficult time breathing, I felt an unknown pain all over my body.

“Am I nauseating?!” the man screamed.

“Ahhhh!”

“Am I! Am I nauseating?!” he screamed again.

“S-Save. Someone… heahhhhhhh!”

‘I’m going to die… ’

“Please he…”

“Lady, I don’t know why you keep asking for help, but… do you think anyone here is willing to help you? If you need help, you should visit the nearby clan vigilantes and ask them for help. There’s no one here that’s willing to help you, lady. They’re all bastards that are busy living their own lives…” he said.

“Please…”

“Hahaha,” the man laughed.

‘Help me… ’

The people that were watching him wore excited looks as if they were looking forward to what was going to happen to me. They weren’t interested in saving me at all.

‘It’s going to be dangerous.’

“N-No.”

‘They’re assailants in some places.’

“Help me. Someone… please…” I said.

‘The people that need help are those that want to better themselves, not the people that are lazily lying around doing nothing.’

“I’m sorry. Please… help me,” I begged.

‘You’re the one that turned them into these lazy bastards.’

“Save me. I’m sorry! Please! Ahhhh! Stop! Stop!” I yelled.

“I told you so, lady saint.”

“Oh…”

“Didn’t I say that not all poor people were nice people?”

When I turned my head, I saw the face of the person I hated the most.

CHAPTER 56
BEING POOR DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NICE (5)

"I told you so, lady saint."

"Oh…"

"Didn't I say that not all poor people were nice people?"

When I looked down, she looked as if she had been through a lot of stuff, and of course, I knew what she experienced because I had been watching this immature woman from the beginning. Her face was covered in tears and snot and it was full of fear. Of course, as soon as she saw me, she looked as if she saw a ray of hope, but I didn't really feel sorry for her. The amusing part was the big difference in her attitude. Her attitude changed completely compared to this morning and when I saw that, I couldn't help but smile.

'As expected, humans are fun.'

The poor people that she thought she needed to protect became the assailants and I was in a situation where I was about to become her savior when previously, she held me in contempt. It would be odd for me not to laugh because personally, this was the most amusing situation that I had encountered so far.

Sun Hee-Young must have gotten hit a lot because her face was swollen and her hair was in a mess. The tidy look she had in the beginning was no longer there as she had bruises all over her. She must have also gotten scratched from somewhere because she was bleeding. If I didn't reveal myself this early, she would have experienced something worse.

"Ahh…"

It only took a moment for the tears that were in her eyes to fall down and I felt that robber bastard's eyes on me as he continued to pull on Sun Hee-Young's hair.

"Who the hell are you?" the man asked.

“That’s none of your business, you trash,” I answered.

“Damn it… this ridiculous situation is making me speechless. Who the hell are you, you bastard?” he asked again.

“Don’t move,” I told him.

Of course I didn’t have the confidence to kill everyone that was here since I was an outnumbered and weak mage. Moreover, I couldn’t trust Jung Ha-Yan, who was reciting a spell behind me. The people that I trusted were actually those people.

They were nothing but trash who only cared about fulfilling their desires. They were the type of people that were strong against the weak and weak against the strong and as expected, I saw that they started to become cautious. The attitudes that both Jung Ha-Yan and I had were no different from theirs, but they felt intimidated because of our confidence.

“W-Where are you from?” he asked.

“None of your business,” I replied.

“That’s…”

When I glanced back, Jung Ha-Yan released the spell that she had been reciting. Just as she spoke, an unknown magic surged and tied them up. Amidst the confusing situation, I heard screams.

Even Sun Hee-Young, who was trembling with wide eyes, started running towards me in a hurry because she realized that I was the only one that could protect her.

“I told you that it was going to be dangerous,” I told her.

“Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for helping me,” she said.

“You can keep your distance from me since you’re already safe, lady priest,” I said.

I saw her grabbing onto my pants leg.

“How was it? Exploring around the slums?” I asked.

“Thank you. Thank you for helping me. Quickly… l-let’s, let’s leave quickly. Quickly… from this place…”

I guess it was impossible for her to think properly. It must be because of the immense amount of fear that all she could think about was escaping from this place. I was not sure what she experienced during the tutorial, but this woman definitely didn’t have the tolerance for this kind of situation. Since I wanted to have somewhat of a serious conversation with her, this situation wasn’t that great for me. Rather than simply rescuing her, I wanted to have a more in-depth conversation with her.

“Let go,” I told her.

“Excuse me?” she asked.

“I said let go before I throw you back to them. You’re just a woman that knows nothing about the world,” I said.

“P-Please don’t do that. You were right, everything you said was right,” she said.

Sun Hee-Young wasn’t thinking properly and desperation was the only thing that filled her face. She wasn't desperately shouting because she regretted her thoughts from before, it was because she simply wanted to escape from here.

“Ha-Yan, release your magic,” I ordered her.

“Okay, oppa,” she answered.

“Don’t do it! Please don’t do it!” Sun Hee-Young yelled.

I didn’t order her to release the bind that stopped those people from moving. I was referring to the illusion magic that was casted on Sun Hee-Young. I wanted it undone so that her true face would appear.

When Jung Ha-Yan slowly released the magic, Sun Hee-Young’s true face appeared.

“Look straight over there,” I told her.

“Excuse me?” she asked.

The faces of the trash that were persecuting our dear lady priest turned because

they realized who they were messing with. The scum looked more like they messed up than regret, but I was sure that they realized the fact that they messed with the wrong person. These scums messed with an important person that was loved by many clans. As such, watching them curse was amusing.

"I…"

"You want to live?" I asked, finishing the scum's sentence.

I saw them nodding, so I spoke with a smirk on my face. "Would you be able to… kill this woman?"

They looked confused and it seemed like they needed a bit more explanation, so I continued talking again. "I asked whether you would be able to kill her."

These brute-like bastards started nodding as if they have been possessed.

"Why… are you asking that?"

"Personally, my impression about her isn't that great and I think it'll be a good sight to watch and there's no reason for scums like you to know the reason. The important thing is whether you can do it or not. I'm giving you guys this chance," I explained.

"…"

"You'll die if you decline," I warned.

"I-I'll do it," they said.

"Of course."

I saw an absent-minded expression on Sun Hee-Young's face.

"H-Hyung-nim… how," they asked.

"Just shut up and do as I say, you bastards! Nothing is going to change anyways," I told them.

"Is it really okay?" they asked.

I nodded lightly and I responded. “Of course.”

“Really?” they asked again.

“I’m not sure whether we’re lucky or not, but… thank you for saving us,” they said.

“Hyung-nim… still…”

“Shut up, you bastard. This bitch is the same as the other bastards. Her saint of the forsaken title is a bunch of bullshit. Didn’t you see her crying earlier? Stay out of it if you don’t want to do it, you bastard,” one of the men said.

“I-I’m not going to stay out of it…”

“You’re saying that you didn’t like her from the start. Not sure why she made a big fuss about helping people when she isn’t all that great… I am thankful that I didn’t have to starve because of her, but who knew that things would turn out like this? Hahaha. You never know, right? You never know what’ll happen in life,” the man explained.

“You’re right,” I said in agreement.

The atmosphere must have excited the man with the burnt face because he was saying things that were pushing me toward an advantageous position. Just by looking at his face, anyone would be able to assume that he was a scumbag, but this great reveal went beyond my expectations that I was close to laughing out loud.

Sun Hee-Young no longer looked like she was scared. On the contrary, she looked like she had given up. I wasn’t exactly sure what she was thinking, but I was sure that she was more confused than I was. She was being denied by the people that she volunteered for and helped for her entire life and even though I didn’t know what that felt like, I was sure that it felt similar to the time when Jung Ha-Yan thought that she lost me.

In the end.

Sob…

I heard her cry pathetically.

“Hahahaha.”

The way the thugs started laughing as if they didn’t feel bad for her was a sight to see. Actually, it wasn’t a great sight to see.

I started to slowly walk away. When I approached them, of course, the scums that surrounded Sun Hee-Young started to back away slowly. When I turned my attention to her, the expression that was on her face was difficult to describe.

“There was… *hiccup*… no need to go this far,” she said.

“Now we can have a proper conversation,” I told her.

“You didn’t have to go this far,” she said again.

“I just helped you so that you’ll become a bit more realistic. So, how was this place?” I asked.

“You were right. *Hiccup*… I said that you were right. I was wrong. I…”

“No, that’s not what I meant,” I said, cutting her off.

“What…”

“You weren’t wrong,” I said.

“What are you talking about?” she asked.

“It’s just like I said, Miss Sun Hee-Young. You weren’t wrong. You were fantastic. Being able to sacrifice for these people is something that an ordinary person isn’t able to do,” I answered.

“…”

“I respect you. If I were you, I wouldn’t be able to wake up every morning and volunteer for these people, but you did not volunteer for them because you expected something back. Despite the fact that you can receive help from a guild or clan, you did not focus on the materialistic aspect and protected your value. You took the lead and helped these people while working hard. You did exactly that,” I explained.

She looked like she was spacing out. I think that she didn't really understand what I was telling her.

"You're at a much lower position than them and excuse me for saying this, but I observed where you lived. When considering your position within society, it's definitely a place that doesn't fit you. You have yielded everything, literally everything and even moved others. You made it so that other clans and guilds would take interest in the poor. Yes, you're fantastic," I explained.

"D-Don't be… dumb," she said.

"You're not the one that turned them into lazy bastards. What I said before was out of jealousy because you had something that I didn't have. Your nobility, beauty and honesty are things that I can't have. I'm the one that's twisted," I told her.

"…"

I saw her crying and I wasn't sure whether it was because she felt comforted or because of the current situation, but I could at least see that I changed her mind.

"You haven't done anything wrong," I said again.

"Okay… *hiccup*…"

"You're fantastic."

"Thank you…"

"You're a respectable person," I told her.

"Thank you…"

"The ones that are wrong are…"

"Yes…"

"Those people," I said.

"Yes."

“Those lazy brute-like bastards are the ones that are wrong because they don’t know anything about grace,” I said.

“…”

“They didn’t appreciate what they were getting and even betrayed you, which makes them wrong. These people are the ones that are making Lindel, the Holy Empire, and society rotten. Even if those with noble minds continue to contribute to society, it won’t get any better because of these people. Yes, it’s because of them. It’s because of them that the slum isn’t improving, why they’re needlessly getting misunderstood and why the light of your nobility is fading away,” I explained.

“Okay… *sob*…”

“It’s not the people that are trying to improve, but the people that aren’t even thinking about improving themselves that are making this place rotten,” I added.

“Yes, yes, I understand,” she said.

“Now then…”

“…”

“Let’s start a genuine volunteer work, lady priest,” I said.

I didn’t hear an answer regarding my bullshit, however, I watched as Sun Hee-Young slowly got up and grabbed the dagger that I handed over to her.

“Let’s make a beautiful Lindel, together,” I said.

CHAPTER 57
IDEAL VOLUNTEER

"Let's create a beautiful Lindel together," I said.

Sun Hee-Young looked like she didn't know what to do and not only was she biting her lips, but she looked very serious. I honestly didn't think that she was going to be this enthusiastic and of course, I had a few methods to use if she acted otherwise, but she was moving more enthusiastically than I imagined. I was expecting her to be scared and hesitant, but I guess she thought differently.

'I guess my plan worked.'

Of course, she was still burdened by the current situation because her hands and feet were shaking. I was sure that she was already mentally exhausted, which was why she wasn't able to think properly.

'Not bad.'

The expression that was on her messed-up face made it seem like she was feeling a sense of duty. I wasn't sure if my assumption was correct, but the expression that was on Sun Hee-Young's face definitely looked as if she was feeling a sense of duty.

The way she slowly raised the dagger and walked toward them reminded me of some kind of religious ritual. It was the same when she did a short prayer and raised her hands in the air. Just from her outer appearance, she didn't seem like she resented them at all.

'Wow… '

"Miss… it… it was our fault," one of the men said.

"W-We weren't in our right minds for a moment. We were really out of our minds," another said.

"Please spare us, miss. I beg you."

“Please spare us. Please… forgive us this once…”

“Miss Mage… d-didn’t you say that you were going to spare us? You said you would…”

The way they begged for their lives during this time was a sight to see. They were already tied up because of Jung Ha-Yan’s magic and as they were waiting for her to cast her magic with the daggers, Sun Hee-Young looked at us.

“A-Are you… are you really… going to do it?” she asked.

It sounded as if she wanted us to stop and obviously, I wasn’t going to do that.

“Yes, so no need to worry. You can consider this the same volunteer work that you’ve been doing since we’re technically helping others. It’s only right to throw out the trash,” I answered.

“I see…” she said.

Sun Hee-Young was someone that had to move with us.

When I smiled brightly at her, she started stabbing with the dagger that she lifted above her head. I heard screams. The way she awkwardly stabbed the people looked fantastic rather than grotesque.

“Ahhhh!”

“Miss…! Please spare…” one of the men said.

“Spare…”

“Ahhhh!”

It could look gruesome to some as blood continued to splatter whilst the people continued to scream. When they screamed for help, no one came to help them. Not only was this place sealed off by magic, but even if we didn’t seal this place, no one was going to come here and save them. Just like they mentioned before, asking for help in this kind of place was a stupid thing to do because the people in the slums were all busy living their own lives. When I recalled how she volunteered for the people that didn’t even think about helping others, I couldn’t help but laugh. But despite that, she didn’t curse or resent them. She just seemed like she wanted to

calmly finish her work despite her hands shaking awkwardly in the air. She didn't ask for my help even though her eyes would sometimes flash with fear.

"Miss! Miss! Please…" one of the men begged.

"You stupid bitch! You call yourself human?" another asked.

"I'm sorry. Please… please!"

"Ahhhh!"

I thought that maybe she was abnormal from the beginning because from my standards, there wasn't anyone that was that selfless.

After some time had passed, the sound of her sobs started to die down and a smile appeared on Sun Hee-Young's face as she quietly collected her breath.

"How was it?" I asked.

She looked a bit flustered. Her eyes were swollen and there was blood flowing down from the cut that was on her forehead, but she spoke with a smile on her face. "It was really… rewarding."

Her voice sounded a bit creepy, but despite that, she looked a bit beautiful for some reason. I was worried about her mental state, but she looked fine. Although there were several conditions that helped her, I believed that the new values that I instilled in her had settled inside her.

'It was a success.'

"Should we get going?" I asked.

"Where…" she asked.

Of course, I wasn't going to make an obvious recruitment offer, so when I quietly extended my hand out, I felt her grabbing it. Jung Ha-Yan looked like she was a bit uncomfortable, but this shouldn't be a problem at all.

"Doing volunteer work with a new meaning isn't something you can do alone and unlike before, we have to do it incognito. I'll work with you," I told her.

“Together,” she repeated.

“Yes, together. There are going to be a lot of problems when trying to realize your worth. After all, it’s something that an ordinary person cannot grasp,” I said.

“I see,” she said.

“I’ll prove to you that you’re not wrong,” I said.

“Okay… Mr. Ki-Young,” she answered.

“You need treatment first…”

“It’s fine since I can do it myself,” she said, interrupting me.

Sun Hee-Young recited a spell quietly and not long after, I became speechless at the sight of her wounds healing. I experienced being under a healing spell once because of the ring that Jung Ha-Yan was wearing, but her wounds were healing a lot faster than me from back then.

‘She’s competent.’

A priest was very rare in this place because not only was it difficult to find people that were suitable for the job, but it was also difficult to find a competent priest. Of course, I felt good about working with a woman that possessed a legendary-ranked holy talent. At the least, I didn’t have to worry about dying after getting hit by an arrow from afar.

The only thing left was to return to the guild with this woman and as I slowly started to walk away, Jung Ha-Yan leaned herself against me. I guess she was worried because I was treating Sun Hee-Young nicely.

Sun Hee-Young opened her mouth while keeping her distance from us, but she didn’t say anything important. She was talking normally. Considering what she went through just now, it was a bit strange how she could talk normally, but seeing how Jung Ha-Yan was responding to her little by little, I guess they didn’t feel that awkward toward each other.

That was when I felt a familiar figure heading toward us.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung?” I asked.

“So it was you, Mr. Ki-Young. What a coincidence that we happened to meet here because I thought you were in your laboratory… did you come out with Miss Ha-Yan to take a stroll?” he asked.

“Oh, actually…”

When I glanced over at Sun Hee-Young, she smiled brightly and spoke. “Nice to meet you. My name is Sun Hee-Young. I came here to volunteer for a bit…”

“Oh, nice to meet you. My name is Kim Hyun-Sung.”

I was a bit confused because it seemed like this was their first time seeing each other.

Then, I saw a child slowly stepping out from behind Kim Hyun-Sung. Since they were still a child, it was a bit difficult to differentiate whether they were a boy or a girl. Their eyes were filled with spite and the dirt that was on their face explained that they were from the slums.

‘Are they?’

When I quickly activated Mind’s Eye, what I saw was a sight to see.

[Checking Player Kim Ye-Ri’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Kim Ye-Ri]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 14]

[Nature - A Scarred Thief]

[Job - Archer]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic archer knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 10/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 31/Above legendary growth limit]

[Stamina - 12/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 15/Below epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 14/Below epic growth limit]

[Luck - 15/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 10/above legendary growth limit]

[Overall Review - Player Kim Ye-Ri possesses above legendary rank stat growth limit. The rank of her agility and magic stats are legendary. The potential of her other stats cannot be compared to yours, so please move cautiously so that you don't become a bad influence on this child. Even though she has been scarred, she's still an innocent child. She's quick to catch on, but please don't hate her.]

'Wow... '

Except for Kim Hyun-Sung, she was the first person I saw that had epic and legendary rank for all of their stats and I was immediately able to catch on to the fact that Sun Hee-Young wasn't the person that he was after. The reason why he visited the slum in the first place was to bring this child over to us. When I slightly looked down, I noticed the child quickly hiding behind Kim Hyun-Sung. She looked like she was scared, but she also seemed like she was confused by the unfamiliar situation. I noticed Sun Hee-Young looking at the child with an unsatisfied expression, but thankfully, no other problems occurred.

"Um, the child…"

"I coincidentally met her in the slums. She seemed talented, so I brought her here

because I'm thinking about teaching her different things. She's thoughtful and it looks like she already has a job even though she's a bit young to go out to hunt… oh! She's really shy, so it'll take some time to get close to her," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"Oh… I see," I said.

"What about you Mr. Ki-Young?" he asked.

"It was the same for me. While walking around the slums, I coincidentally met this priest… while having a conversation with her, we sort of had a connection," I answered.

"Ohh," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

The way Kim Hyun-Sung looked at Sun Hee-Young suggested that this was really his first time seeing her and it felt like he was quietly judging her.

'Does he really not know her?'

If I were Kim Hyun-Sung, I would have done my best to recruit that child as well as Sun Hee-Young because the potential of her holy stats was above legendary. No matter the reason, she was one of the people that had the potential to shake the future.

Honestly, it didn't make any sense because even though the slum was a pretty large place, they could have met a few times since there was always a large group following Sun Hee-Young. Despite that, seeing as how Kim Hyun-Sung didn't try to recruit her, I guess he didn't really get a different impression of her.

'How could that be?'

She was a priest with a secured future and even though she was still developing, she was the type of person that was going to grow even more in the future. That was when I suddenly had a strange thought. It would be understandable if Kim Hyun-Sung didn't pay much attention to her because she experienced an unexpected accident in the near future. I was sure that in his past life, he was really busy at this point, so it was right to think that he worked desperately in order to adapt to the unfamiliar environment. He probably didn't have the luxury to think about the rumors about the slums since Lindel was a large city and a lot of things were happening at the same time.

In order to survive, he probably either went out to hunt or locked himself up somewhere to focus on his training, so it was possible that he didn't hear anything about the Saint of the Forsaken. I did think that Sun Hee-Young may have continued to live this life, but it was reasonable to think that the possibility of that was low. When thinking about the saying, *talent will show itself*, my assumption sounded a bit more convincing, but it was nothing more than an assumption in the end.

But for some reason, the thought of Sun Hee-Young not doing anything and dying in the past popped into my head, and of course, I didn't know how she died. She could have died during an expedition after receiving a guild or a clan offer or maybe a war broke out in that timeline and she got caught in it. She could have also gotten sick or she may have experienced something horrible due to a misunderstanding with a guild or a clan.

Or maybe…

'The people of the slums killed her.'

I didn't know everything that happened before Kim Hyun-Sung regressed. All I could do was assume, but for some reason, I couldn't help but think that Sun Hee-Young had lived a bit of a bitter life in her past life.

No, I was almost certain of it…

"I look forward to working with you, Miss Hee-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"I look forward to working with you… as well, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I think I'll be indebted to you for the time being," she said.

…Since she was the ideal volunteer.

CHAPTER 58
REGRESSOR BUS

If I were to talk about the conclusion first, then Kim Ye-Ri, the kid that Kim Hyun-Sung brought, and Sun Hee-Young, the woman that I brought, both joined Kim Hyun-Sung's party. Even though Kim Hyun-Sung was the only person that had the authority to decide who joined party seven, some of the members of the administration team gave a skeptical look because we didn't do enough consulting with them prior to this. Basically, this was done arbitrarily. The biggest reason why Kim Hyun-Sung was seen in a negative light was that he only had one year of experience. Besides that, they were shocked when they saw our results, but as expected, the gramps didn't bother expressing that.

Sun Hee-Young's recruitment was something that many guilds and clans wanted so it wasn't unreasonable for them to remain quiet.

'We even recruited her at a really cheap price.'

She said that she wasn't going to join any guilds or clans, but when the news about her joining the Blue Guild started to spread, it was obvious that the guild's stock prices were going to increase.

Kim Hyun-Sung's party was already receiving attention, but we were now the center of attention in the free city of Lindel. Even though I didn't know the history behind the people that were summoned here, I was certain that a rookie party shouldn't receive this much attention.

"Hyung-nim! It's time to eat," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Got it," I answered.

When I was focusing on my experiment in my room, Park Deok-Gu lightly knocked on the door and entered the room. Recently, our party started eating three meals together. It was not only to become closer to Sun Hee-Young and Kim Ye-Ri, who were the new members of the party, but it was also to discuss the overall situation and our plans for the future.

Unlike us four, who were close together, the two sort of kept their distance from us. Surprisingly, it seemed like Jung Ha-Yan and Sun Hee-Young were getting along, but it was obvious that they weren't that close. Kim Ye-Ri was very shy, so I haven't talked to her even once.

'She catches onto things quickly.'

I wasn't sure if she used magic or was good at smelling out the person in power, but the way she stuck to Kim Hyun-Sung's side was a sight to see. I knew that it was going to take some time to get close to her, but it was frustrating how things weren't improving.

While I was organizing the many thoughts in my head, Park Deok-Gu started talking. "More than that, what exactly are you experimenting with every time?"

"A lot of things. It's difficult for me to be specific since I've been working on many things at once," I answered.

"Can't you tell us one of them? I'm going crazy because I'm really curious. You're in your room experimenting every day, so isn't it about time that you told us?" he asked.

"Well…"

"Hey, don't be like that and tell us one," Park Deok-Gu said.

"The potion that I've been working on recently touches one's emotions…" I started.

"Is that possible?" he asked.

"It's only a theory. Honestly, it's almost impossible. I think it's possible to touch one of the basic needs that a person has, but…" I said.

"For example?" he asked, interrupting me.

"Emotions like sexual desire, sleep, and appetite, but to be exact, I'm not touching the emotions themselves. It's just simply making one feel drowsy or making one's body feel exhausted…" I explained.

"No way… you shouldn't be touching those emotions anyway, right?" he asked.

“That’s why humans are amusing because humans are animals that believe that the emotions that they are feeling are their own. For example, let’s just say that I created a potion that relaxed the muscle and made the body comfortable. When I add a magical element to it, humans will feel that their body is listless because the brain interprets the body’s signal at will,” I explained.

“Ohhh…”

“It’s the same for other cases like adding heat to the body or making the heart beat a bit faster. Just a little bit of touch can cause a person to feel easily excited or easily annoyed,” I said.

“That sounds a bit scary for some reason…” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“If one’s intelligence is low, then it’ll have a better effect. If not…”

“If not?” he asked.

“Then someone whose mentality is a bit unstable,” I answered.

“Ugh…”

I guess he felt a bit flustered when I told him that a potion could control one’s emotion because he looked a bit scared. I was having fun recently, but it wasn’t ready to be used yet. There had to be a dramatic situation to justify its use and I needed a variety of ingredients, so I couldn’t fully use the potion yet. Actually, it was nothing more than a prototype of the potion that I really wanted to make, but I couldn’t say that it was totally useless.

“I’m joking,” I said.

“Huh?”

“I said I was joking. There’s no way that something like that will actually work,” I explained.

“Jeez, hyung-nim!”

“I was just imagining it because every experiment starts with the imagination. It means that ideas are important,” I said.

“Oh! Then is it possible to bring silly ideas to life?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“If the situation is right,” I answered.

“You mean like a love potion?” he asked.

“That’s just an extension of what I told you earlier,” I replied.

“Then, what about a potion that increases one’s stats? Or a potion that turns a person invisible? Or,” he said, giving suggestions.

“…”

“A potion that turns the person into a monster. Is that possible?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

I wasn’t sure if he was asking because he knew something or if he was asking for the sake of it, but the potions that he mentioned were ones that I was researching. When I looked at him with a slightly surprised expression, the way he was pouring out ideas with a smile was a sight to see. Among his ideas, there were things that I didn’t even think about, so it was to the point that I was seeing him in a different light.

‘Is this bastard an idiot or a genius?’

I was not sure when it was going to happen, but I had a feeling that he was going to give me an idea that I had never thought about. It was nothing more than giving interesting ideas and had nothing to do with theories, but some of the things that he said hit the nail, so I couldn’t help but memorize what he said.

When I slowly walked down the guild house’s basement, I saw the party members gathered together there.

“Oppa, you’re here,” Jung Ha-Yan said, greeting me.

“Mr. Ki-Young.”

“Please have a seat.”

Jung Ha-Yan was looking at me happily and as expected, Sun Hee-Young was quietly sitting in front of the table with a neat look. Kim Hyun-Sung greeted me with a nod

and Kim Ye-Ri, who was the youngest, seemed like she was still wary of me.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning.”

When I took my seat, Jung Ha-Yan immediately brought me food and Sun Hee-Young poured water and quietly handed it to me. It was interesting how Sun Hee-Young’s nature didn’t change and it was shocking how she was still maintaining her ideal volunteer nature. It was probably possible because she took my advice about accepting her actions as volunteer work, but I thought that maybe her ideal volunteer nature no longer suited her. Instead, her job changed.

[Dark Priest - Epic Rank]

Her original job, Priest of the Sun, changed to Dark Priest. I thought that maybe the situation back then influenced it, but after looking at her stats a few times, I noticed that her stats didn’t change at all. As always, she was still able to use holy magic and even Kim Hyun-Sung was pretty surprised by her stats.

Of course, Jung Ha-Yan’s stats also caught my attention since she had been focusing on her training. Her magic stat increased to 40 points and for Kim Hyun-Sung, our lovely regressor, no other explanation was needed. Actually, Park Deok-Gu’s growth was a bit slow. Even though his endurance stats were increasing, the growth speed of his strength and stamina were a bit slow. The main problem was that his agility stat barely grew at all. He seemed like he was frustrated with himself, but I knew his feelings very well because I was in the same position as him when I noticed that my stats had become stagnant.

When everyone sat down, Kim Hyun-Sung started talking. “Let’s eat.”

“Enjoy,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Enjoy your food,” Kim Hyun-Sung said. He was the leader of the party so it was only natural to show respect and after nodding lightly, we started eating in the quiet atmosphere. I could hear small conversations here and there. Everyone was talking

about different things.

It was while we were spending time talking when Kim Hyun-Sung quietly opened his mouth. “I have something to tell all of you.”

Of course, everyone stayed quiet.

“Yes?”

“I received an offer from the guild’s sub guild master this morning,” he said.

“What kind of offer?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“It’s a dungeon capture. It seems like the parties from the other large guilds nearby will also participate, not just us. I would like to hear your opinions,” he said.

It was a slightly unexpected situation, but I knew that we had to go hunt or to a dungeon sooner or later since our party was composed of a bunch of rookies that arrived here recently and we needed to grow as fast as possible. If all six of the members, including Kim Ye-Ri, went then our party would look somewhat legit, so the timing wasn’t so bad.

What was a bit surprising was that parties from other guilds would also participate. I thought we were going into a dungeon that only the regressor knew about and that we would be able to experience something great that only he knew about. It was natural for me to think that there wasn’t a reason for the other uninvited guests to be there.

“Can you tell us the details regarding the dungeon?” I asked.

I couldn’t help but ask and when I did, Kim Hyun-Sung explained with a small smile. “Of course. I haven’t heard the details yet, but supposedly, a mid-sized party discovered a new dungeon in the area near the tutorial dungeon.”

“But that’s…”

“The problem is the party members. Since it is a dungeon that has recently been discovered by a party that was formed by people from different guilds and clans instead of a party that was formed by a single guild, the question of which guild the dungeon should belong to is unclear,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

'Oh… '

I somewhat had an idea of what was going on.

"They're not going to participate in the dungeon capture?" I asked.

"They're not going to. The survey result showed that the dungeon is at least an average-ranked dungeon and maybe a rare-ranked at most, so they don't think that it's worth it. Although I am sure that they will receive a reward within the guild and that they are going to take their own share once the dungeon capture is complete," he said.

"Rather than doing it themselves…"

"The guilds and clans decided to invest in their own parties that are still growing," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Simply put, a friendly party was created with the members from different guilds and they coincidentally found a rare-ranked dungeon, but they felt that the dungeon rank was too low for the party to enter themselves. Rather than going in there and capturing it themselves, they thought that it would be best to pass it onto the parties that needed experience right now.

'They must have a good relationship.'

It was a bit interesting to see them share the dungeon instead of fighting over who was going to own it, but I guess for them, it was good news since each of the guilds would receive rewards and a share of the dungeon once it was successfully captured. Seeing as how they weren't fighting over the rare-ranked dungeon, I guess they were ranked pretty high within society. If they were obsessed with gold or items, then they wouldn't have yielded the dungeon in the first place.

"One party from the Blue Guild, one party from the Red Mercenary Guild, one party from the Devil's Guild, and lastly, one party from the Black Swan Guild will be participating in the dungeon capture. Even though it's only a rare-ranked dungeon, the size of the dungeon is a bit large, so they're saying that there will be a problem with all the parties moving together. I think after we capture the dungeon, we'll mostly split the items based on the level of contribution…" Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“Based on the level of contribution?” I asked.

“Yes, but the goal of this dungeon isn't items or goods. It’s experience,” he said.

I somewhat had an idea about Kim Hyun-Sung’s plan. Although his explanation was long, there was only one goal.

‘The growth of the party.’

Of course, there wasn’t a reason to reject it. After all, our regressor had decided that it was the right direction.

‘Thanks, Hyun-Sung.’

It was about time for everyone to ride on the regressor bus.[1]

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1. to ride a bus usually means to get carried ☜

CHAPTER 59
DUNGEON CONTROL IS POLITICS (1)

Since the dungeon control was scheduled kind of suddenly, everyone was pretty busy. Lee Sang-Hee, the mother of our guild, was in charge of training our party, and even after our training, we were detained by Kim Hyun-Sung. This was our daily routine. But to be honest, I had no recollection of us using our individual abilities in a team during a basic hunt.

What we had experienced in the tutorial dungeon could be considered as experience, but tutorial dungeons weren't categorized into ranks, so basically, our party skipped the typical growth process. An ordinary party would start training near the edge of the Monster's Forest and they would start their hunting journey by fighting against small monsters first. Since the overall stats of Kim Hyun-Sung's party was high, it may seem like a trivial task, but still, this kind of growth process was important because even though people couldn't see it, their stats were getting stacked.

Since we were going to enter the dungeon right away, we were busy acquiring basic knowledge and practicing battle formations so that our movement wouldn't interrupt the other parties. We also memorized the monster's type and trait.

It was safe to say that the other guild's party was in charge of preparing everything that was necessary for the dungeon control, so in other words, they had the advantage. The other guild's party was being considerate of us.

'Though I'm not sure if that'll work well… '

The rookie parties from each guild were really lucky because they were given the opportunity to enter a rare-ranked dungeon. Working with another party may be uncomfortable, but on the other hand, it meant that it was going to be that much safer. I had the opportunity to see how the other parties moved and I could watch how dungeon controls worked. Of course, I couldn't say that the parties we were going to be working with were strong, but being able to watch my seniors at work was still going to be helpful. Basically, I was lucky in many ways.

"Are you… really thinking about taking her?" I asked Kim Hyun-Sung.

“Yes. It’ll probably be dangerous, but I’m sure it’ll be a good experience. The fact that she’s young may be a disadvantage, but it can also be an advantage,” he answered.

“I see.”

The fact that Kim Hyun-Sung was trying to take Kim Ye-Ri with us was pretty surprising, but I was sure that it was going to be safe.

Since Kim Hyun-Sung was pouring all of his energy into her, he should be able to rule out any threats that would pop up.

Anyways, time continued to pass and the party was becoming more complete. Kim Hyun-Sung rarely went out to attend meetings now and I could feel the Blue Guild’s seventh party’s first expedition approaching.

And on the day of the expedition, an unusually busy morning started.

“Deok-Gu, did you prepare everything?” I asked.

“Of course. A few of the guild members prepared it ahead of time…” he answered.

“Miss Hee-Young, can you please check to make sure that nothing is missing? And if there’s anyone that’s feeling sick…”

“Okay, Mr. Ki-Young,” she answered, interrupting me.

“Ha-Yan, check to make sure there’s nothing wrong with the food, water, and potions,” I ordered.

“Okay, oppa,” she answered.

Honestly, I was the busiest person, and usually, the person that often took the initiative in doing chores was favored by their superior. Of course, I wasn’t talking about intervening in the actual plan of the dungeon control or putting Kim Hyun-Sung in an uncomfortable situation. It was all about the basics of what had to be done, like checking the necessary supplies and making preparations for the expedition ahead of time. They were all chores that had nothing to do with the dungeon control. As such, there wasn’t a need for our lovely regressor to worry about these things.

'Your hyung will prepare everything, Hyun-Sung, so you don't have to worry.'

As expected, he was looking at me with satisfaction and since I couldn't go up against him with my stats or power, it was important that I impress him with these chores.

'This bastard… even though he's weak, I really need him.'

It was important that I leave that kind of impression on him.

"Check to make sure that we're not missing any gear. Ha-Yan, if you're done, go down to the guild's storage room and bring the gear that we rented out…" I told her.

"Okay, oppa," she said.

"Don't forget to grab the arrows that Ye-Ri is going to use," I reminded her.

"Okay!" she answered.

Even though we were busy, it was still important to look busier since this was our first expedition. In addition, I had to claim my position within the party in advance.

If Kim Hyun-Sung was the father of the party, then Lee Ki-Young was the mother and it didn't sound all that bad.

The benefits I obtained were disproportionate to the work I was doing. After all, I was only checking the list and making sure that we were fully prepared for the upcoming expedition. I unknowingly smiled when I saw the happy look on Kim Hyun-Sung's face.

"I think we're pretty much done with preparations, so you can do the final check…"

"No, it's fine Mr. Ki-Young. I'm sure there won't be any problems. The other parties should be waiting for us outside, so we should start heading out soon," he said, interrupting me.

"Okay," I said in agreement.

Being trusted by the regressor was more fun than I thought because he looked at me as if he fully trusted me. I couldn't help but feel good when he decided not to do one final check.

“Let’s head out,” he said.

“Okay.”

While slowly heading outside, people were looking at us for some reason. Of course, I was sure that there were some that were just looking at us without any reason, but the majority of the people were focused on us.

“It’s Sun Hee-Young. This time…”

“Is that the party that the Blue Guild recruited recently?”

“I heard that the guild paid a lot of money to recruit them, but… we’ll see if they were really worth it.”

“I’m jealous. *Sigh*… compared to us, it’s like they’re starting out with an advantage. They’re…”

“It’s because they’re that skilled.”

“But they haven’t actually shown anything yet, right?”

“Isn’t that why they’re going out to hunt now?”

“I’m sure they’ll enter a dungeon that the guild is supporting.”

There were some that were jealous of us and others that had different opinions, but it was understandable for them to be jealous of us after looking at the variety of gears we had. Even though they were gears that we rented from the guild’s storage room, the reality was that some of them didn’t even have average-ranked gears. The people that were looking at us enviously were wearing gears that were basically rags, so of course, it was only natural for them to compare their gears with us.

Anyone could tell just from looking at Park Deok-Gu’s gear. Instead of the fragile wooden shield that he used in the tutorial, he was holding an iron shield that was of pretty decent quality, and instead of wearing the leather armor that had been tied together using a shoelace, he was wearing chainmail. If Park Deok-Gu’s strength stat was a bit higher, then he could have worn plate armor and in the spot that was supposed to hold a low-ranked sword, there should have been a blunt weapon. Even though he didn’t have an epic-ranked item, this was more than enough to show that

he wasn't a rookie.

As I was walking while having different thoughts, I saw other members wearing their guild's insignia.

"Nice to meet you," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Likewise."

Since the party leaders met a few times before, they were comfortable enough to shake hands and it was the same for the remaining party members.

The members that had the red insignia on their chest were of course from the Red Mercenary Guild. I noticed them looking at me in a friendly manner.

'Yeah, yeah.'

"Nice to meet you. I'm Choi Young-Ki from the Red Mercenary Guild. I've heard a lot about you from our guild master. You…"

"Oh, nice to meet you. My name is Lee Ki-Young," I said, interrupting him.

It was natural for Cha Hee-Ra, the guild master of the Red Mercenary Guild, to either want to look good in front of me or be in a situation where she was on my side. Seeing as how they were dressed in red overall, their identity was pretty clear.

The people that were greeting Jung Ha-Yan were the party that was from the Devil's Guild. The insignia they were wearing looked like a magic circle and I guess they were curious about a lot of things because they were already having a conversation with Jung Ha-Yan. The people that were talking to Kim Hyun-Sung were from the Black Swan Guild. They were also wearing their guild's insignia and the party was made up of five females and one male.

'It's exactly as I've heard… '

Even though the majority of the members were female, they looked like a unified party even though there was only a small gap between their skills. The red party's melee line looked strong, the bookworms were skilled as ranged attackers while the black guild had a good balance overall since their stats were between the 40s and 50s. They all looked like the parties that each of the guilds would support and since

there were so many of them, greeting each and every person was an issue. It was obvious, but Sun Hee-Young was the most popular among us since she was a priest.

“I guess you’ve decided to become active.”

“Yes, something happened, so… I decided to join the Blue Guild. I look forward to working with everyone,” Sun Hee-Young said.

“You seem very reliable, haha.”

“I’m not. Honestly, I’m not used to going into dungeons, so I’ll need a lot of help. I look forward to working with you,” she said.

“Yes, of course. Let’s head out now,” the other member suggested.

Based on the atmosphere, it looked like Choi Young-Ki of the Red Mercenary Guild was going to be the one leading the dungeon control because not only was he part of the largest guild, but he had decent stats. He didn’t possess legendary-ranked stats, but he had epic-ranked potential and I guess he was a tank because his endurance and stamina were in the 50s. Not only that, but his agility stat wasn’t low either. If I had to explain it, it was as if Choi Young-Ki was an upgraded version of Park Deok-Gu, so if he grew in the most ideal way, then Park Deok-Gu would probably end up being like him.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung, it’s an honor to be able to personally meet the famous party,” he said.

“No, we just happened to be lucky and this is our first expedition… we joined in order to learn rather than to actually do something,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Hahaha, I actually watched you during your last demonstration and I thought… geniuses really do exist. Being too humble can be harmful sometimes,” Choi Young-Ki said.

“Thank you very much for the compliment,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I couldn’t help but think that way about you. Of course, Miss Jung Ha-Yan was really amazing as well,” he said.

Choi Young-Ki of the Red Mercenary Guild was pretty cheerful, but the Devil’s Guild

was generally quiet. I wasn't sure what the black guild was thinking, but they didn't look like they were wary of us. Of course, that didn't mean they didn't have anything to complain about and as I expected, it was because of Kim Ye-Ri's presence.

That was when the leader of the black guild, who looked as if there was something she wanted while walking quietly, opened her mouth. "Mr. Hyun-Sung, you never mentioned that you were going to bring a child to the expedition."

"She won't get in the way. She's more like a talented archer than a child, but I'll keep an eye on her so that she won't be a nuisance," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"But still…"

"I'll make sure to keep an eye on her," he said, cutting her off.

"*Whew*…"

She could've said more during the conversation, but I guess that she wasn't really a nice person after seeing her openly sigh. It was to the point that she openly made the other person feel awkward. I did look into her stats when we first met, but I thought I should look again, so I slowly activated Mind's Eye.

[Checking Player Jung Yoo-Ra's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Yoo-Ra]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 29]

[Nature - Calculative Strategist]

[Job - Assassinating Thief - Rare Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic archery knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic dagger knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic entrapment knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic assassination knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 41/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 55/Above epic growth limit]

[Stamina - 43/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 40/Below rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 20/Above rare growth limit]

[Luck - 23/Below rare growth limit]

[Magic - 43/Above epic growth limit]

[Overall Review - As an assassin, Player Jung Yoo-Ra possesses useful stats and potential. I can see that her nature, job, and stats go well together and she possesses a talent that'll help her grow easily. Let's say that she obtains a legendary-ranked item or job, she's the type of person that'll grow immensely. She doesn't seem to have that great of a personality but compared to you, it's a drop in a bucket.]

'Not bad.'

Since I have seen so many amazing stats, I wasn't that amazed by her stats, but like it was mentioned in the overall review, her potential growth wasn't that bad and her nature suited her job as an assassin very well. I think it was safe for me to assume that her stats were the ideal stats for completing a rare-ranked dungeon capture. I guess her role was taking apart traps and putting the enemy's backline in confusion.

I pretty much noticed what kind of personality she had.

“We’re not teachers of a daycare, *sigh*…” she commented.

My earlier assumption was solidified even more when I heard the words that she whispered into the air as I passed by her.

CHAPTER 60
DUNGEON CONTROL IS POLITICS (2)

I could understand what she was talking about since from their point of view, they had sacrificed a lot of things just for our party. What was worse was that our party had the lowest stats among the parties here. In addition, we also had the least amount of experience in dungeons. This was our first time hunting and they knew that. Despite sacrificing so much, if a child like Kim Ye-Ri showed up, then I would have said something along the lines of what she said as well.

"Now, now, let's not say that and enjoy it. Let's have fun," Choi Young-Ki said, trying to lighten the mood.

"How can you have fun during a dungeon expedition, Mr. Choi Ki-Young? This isn't a joke. Even though we have a lot of people… it's only natural for me to worry," Jung Yoo-Ra said.

"That's…"

"Even if our overall stat is high… *whew*… we're not here to go sightseeing. We need to be aware of the fact that the situation can become dangerous at any time," she added.

"We'll work harder," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

During this situation, I noticed Choi Young-Ki of the Red Mercenary Guild trying to read our expressions, which made me think that he received some kind of hint from Cha Hee-Ra. I thought it would be best to say something even if I didn't really mean it. "Of course, I'm not saying that I don't trust the Red Mercenary Guild…"

"*Ahem*… the situation has become a bit uncomfortable. Let's lighten the mood by conducting a simple briefing," Choi Young-Ki said.

"Okay."

"Sure."

“I’m sure you heard, but the dungeon we’re going to enter is a rare-ranked dungeon. The name of the dungeon is Garden of Horror and the guild’s analysis shows that there’s going to be mostly plant-type monsters in there…” he explained.

We already knew that, so I guess he just brought it up in order to lighten the mood. Even while walking, Choi Young-Ki was trying his best to improve the party’s atmosphere, which made me realize that he wasn’t such a bad person.

“Hyung-nim, that dude is a good person, right?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yeah, he seems like a nice guy,” I answered.

It was to the point that Park Deok-Gu commented on his personality and I agreed with him. I felt that he had the qualities of a leader and wasn’t simply a nice person. A tank like him was very reliable since he was a calm person that knew how to treat people and was also talented at the same time. I was certain that he was a veteran because he was good at reading the air and was working hard in trying to minimize conflict. He was worthy of being Park Deok-Gu’s goal.

As we continued our conversation while walking, we arrived at the dungeon. Passing through the thorny bushes were a bit annoying, but after walking a bit farther, I saw the entrance of the dungeon.

‘Why is it so small?’

I felt a strange magic at the entrance and the entrance was so small that only two people could fit through it. It was to the point that the tutorial dungeon looked grander because I never imagined that there would be an entrance to a dungeon like this. I was beginning to think that it wasn’t unreasonable that they weren’t able to find this place all this time.

After nodding for a moment, Choi Young-Ki continued. “Let’s go in slowly and for the order of entrance, we’ll go in first, then the Black Swan, Devil’s Guild, and then the Blue Guild. There’s a possibility that we may fight as soon as we enter, so after we’re done preparing for battle, we’ll enter.”

“Okay,” everyone replied.

One by one, the members entered the dungeon by bending their waist forward and I started walking inside the dungeon while holding Jung Ha-Yan’s arm.

My body trembled for a moment because of the change in the atmosphere, but then I immediately heard a familiar message.

[You've entered a rare-ranked dungeon, Garden of Horror. Confirmed [24/30] participants.]

I heard an urgent voice after that.

"Let's make room! Room! We need room!"

I was a bit confused because as soon as we entered, we experienced a violent welcome. Maybe it was because of the rare-ranked unique magic, but I found it hard to breathe for some reason.

The Red Mercenary Guild specialized in melee combat, so they tried their best to block the monsters charging towards us.

What we saw were extremely grotesque-looking plants and describing them as giants that took the form of a plant was the best description. They were about twice the size of a human and they had such a bulky body that we had to look up to them. It seemed like their bodies were made out of vines and roots and even though it was difficult to understand their movements, that wasn't important right now.

When I tapped on Park Deok-Gu, who was absent-mindedly staring at them, he must have come back to his senses because I saw him immediately charge towards the front.

"Deok-Gu," I called out.

"Ah, got it," he said.

I guess he spaced out because of the unexpected situation, not because he was scared. I saw his back as he ran towards the front while holding his large shield. Of course, the tanks of the other parties were in the front and were pushing back the monsters that were attacking us. They were trying to make room so that the swordsmen and lancers could move in.

“We’ll continue pushing them back, so please start attacking them slowly,” Choi Young-Ki ordered.

“Ha!”

Park Deok-Gu, who jumped to the front courageously, suddenly lost his balance because he couldn’t endure a monster’s attack.

“Miss Sun Hee-Young,” I said.

“I understand,” she said.

As if this wasn’t her first time doing this, Sun Hee-Young started casting a spell towards Park Deok-Gu. Kim Hyun-Sung also moved in order to support him. Since Park Deok-Gu was no longer beside us, a monster with a large body started charging towards us, and honestly, that sight made me cower.

‘Shit.’

I was sure that nothing was going to happen, but our formation broke apart. I thought about casting the spell that was ingrained in the ring, but it would be a waste to use it at the entrance of the dungeon. I thought it was going to be okay since I saw Kim Hyun-Sung moving to support the party, but for some reason, I was worried. That was when the monster that was charging towards suddenly slammed into a wall. Before I knew it, Choi Young-Ki ran towards the monster and had pushed it aside.

Boom!

“Assistance over here!”

“Got it,” he answered.

“*Whew*…”

The situation became organized in an instant, I did expect that there would be some difference between us and them when it came to our levels, but as the party that entered last, the entrance became organized before we could even do anything. Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung was diligently damaging the monsters, but before Jung Ha-Yan and I were able to cast our spells, I saw the monsters getting killed one by one.

I thought about how they probably arrived here a few years before us. There was definitely a difference between our party and them. It wasn't just in our basic stats. There was a difference in experience as well as our teamwork.

'I didn't do anything.'

When the situation calmed down a bit, Park Deok-Guk was being supported by Choi Young-Ki and I guess he was feeling dumbfounded.

"I think you moved too quickly," Choi Young-Ki told him.

"Well… um… thank you," Park Deok-Gu said.

"It happens often when you lack experience. It'll be better if you put your strength into your lower body," he suggested. "O-Okay," Park Deok-Gu said.

Choi Young-Ki of the Red Mercenary Guild patted Park Deok-Gu's shoulder and for some reason, I started feeling grateful because he was taking care of us.

"Let's start cleaning up the area," Choi Young-Ki said.

"Okay."

I didn't think that he was seriously injured, but when I saw Park Deok-Gu trudge towards us, he looked like he was feeling bitter.

"I… I'm… sorry. Hyung-nim and… everyone…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"You don't need to apologize, Mr. Deok-Gu. This is all part of the experience," Kim Hyung-Sung said.

"Still…"

"Mr. Hyun-Sung is right, Deok-Gu. There's no need to be sad about it. You just need to do your best while watching and learning from them. You can just do better next time," I explained.

"*Whew*… okay," he said.

"Since you're a bit on the heavier side, your attacks will feel a bit heavier. It'll be

better if you lower your body to the point that you're almost touching the ground," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"Oh."

"It might take you some time to get used to it, but I'm sure you'll be able to do it," he said.

"He's right, Mr. Deok-Gu," Choi Young-Ki said.

We have been together since the beginning, so seeing him depressed like this worried me a bit and to be honest, the level of Park Deok-Gu's talent was similar to the other tanks over there. Compared to the others, he did grow pretty fast, but overall, he simply lacked experience and stats. Unlike the rear support that could just follow the party, I was sure that he felt really stressed as a close-range member since his mistakes would easily be spotted.

Comforting Park Deok-Gu was my first task and since he was a naive person, of course, he was going to be influenced by the environment. Just when I thought that taking care of his mental health was the most important, I heard a loud voice.

"Excuse me, Mr. Choi Young-Ki," Jung Yoo-Ra called out.

"Yes? Is there something you would like to say, Miss Yoo-Ra?" he asked.

"Regarding the members from the Blue Guild, I think it would be best to place their tank in the rear…" she suggested.

"Oh."

"I was watching and he seemed to be lacking physically… it'll be kind of dangerous if someone like him remains in the front. We managed to make do this time because we're still near the entrance, but the deeper we go in, the more danger he'll be in," Jung Yoo-Ra of the Black Swan explained.

'Sigh… '

I noticed Park Deok-Gu trying to read my expression.

"That's…"

“I understand that he wasn’t summoned here recently, but I think he lacks a bit in experience and stats for him to stand in the front,” she said.

“I’m sure he’ll adapt soon and his endurance stats seem fine… if that situation comes again, then I’ll do the same thing and…”

“That’s the problem. If you leave, then our formation will be in danger. Unlike the Red Mercenary Guild which has good endurance stats, if we exclude the tank in our party, then our overall endurance stats will be on the lower end and if you leave your position, we won’t know what kind of accidents will happen. If the main tank… leaves his place, I’m sure you understand very well what’s going to happen, right?” Jung Yoo-Ra asked, cutting off Choi Young-Ki.

“That’s true, but… you can just tell me…” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“That’s why I’m giving you a suggestion. I’m sure the Devil’s Guild agrees with me, right?” she asked.

Choi Young-Ki wasn’t intentionally keeping his silence and I was sure that it wasn’t because I was receiving Cha Hee-Ra’s protection.

Four parties gathered for this expedition and if the party was from one guild, then Choi Young-Ki would be able to make decisions on his own, but since it was about Park Deok-Gu’s placement, our party had the right to decide that. Even if it was reasonable to make that kind of suggestion, Jung Yoo-Ra should have suggested it to Kim Hyun-Sung, the leader of our party. In addition, she should have said this quietly instead of saying loudly so that everyone could hear her because her actions would only create conflict.

‘That bitch… ’

I had a feeling before entering the dungeon, but I now had an idea of what that woman wanted.

‘Calculative strategist?’

I could feel her friendliness right when I saw her nature.

It felt like she was trying to secure her position in order to bring us down rather than to ensure our safety during the dungeon control. That woman realized just how

important having a voice was within a group like this and I was sure that her goal was her contribution level in the item distribution that would take place after completing the dungeon control. For our party, we weren't even interested in the item distribution for this dungeon, to begin with. Despite the fact that we only joined just to get experience, I guess she found us annoying because we were basically getting carried.

I was sure that she had a hidden intention of wanting to increase her influence within the party, but her method was pretty low and mean. This kind of method was commonly known as politics and I never imagined that there would be someone here doing that kind of nonsense.

'You're trying to be political?'

I started to have the urge to speak because that type of politics and instigation was my specialty.

CHAPTER 61
DUNGEON CONTROL IS POLITICS (3)

Being aware of your surroundings and the current situation was important for this kind of politics. In other words, it meant that giving choices to the people that had the right to vote was the most important. Politics was basically a fight over public opinion so I had to take other people's reactions into consideration. With that in mind, I didn't believe that the timing was right since, unlike Jung Yoo-Ra who had a secure position and a voice, I was nothing but a party member that had nothing. Even if the Red Mercenary Guild looked at me in a favorable light, it would be difficult for them to support me.

I could say that my first task was to solidify my presence within this expedition.

"I'm really sorry," I said.

I apologized first and naturally, their gazes fell upon me.

"I understand that it's a bit uncomfortable and nerve-wracking for you to work with us. After all, we are first-timers when it comes to expeditions. But if you give us one more chance, we will do our best and make sure that we're doing our part," I said to her.

"But this is…"

"I know which part you're worried about, but I hope you'll give us another chance. There won't be another opening in the formation," I said, interrupting her.

Being as honest as possible was important because an honest apology was a good method to sway the hearts of the public. As expected, I saw the others nodding and I tried my best to show the utmost respect.

I also noticed that Jung Yoo-Ra was looking a bit flustered because she was starting to realize that she was in a position where she needed to yield.

"I'm sorry."

Even Park Deok-Gu started bowing his head, but honestly, Jung Yoo-Ra wasn't the person he needed to apologize to. After all, based on what had happened, it wasn't like she had been in danger since we were the ones that could have died.

When we bowed our heads, she could have crossed the line by asserting her opinion, but she wasn't an idiot that couldn't read the atmosphere. "Dungeon control isn't a joke and honestly, I don't like how you asked for another chance, but… I'll keep an eye out one more time," Jung Yoo-Ra said.

"Thank you," I told her.

It was only natural for me to bow and for some reason, Park Deok-Gu looked touched, so he started talking to me. "Hyung-nim, I… really don't know what to say."

"It's nothing, Deok-Gu. Everyone makes mistakes, so pull yourself together and don't get scared; you can do it," I told him.

"Hyung… Hyung-nim," he said.

When I patted his back, I saw him starting to sniffle. If an accident had happened because of this incident, then Jung Yoo-Ra's words would have been more convincing. If there had been casualties, then we wouldn't have been able to avoid responsibility for it since it was a situation where we were the ones that made the mistake. It could have even turned into a situation where a simple apology wouldn't cut it, but in the end, this expedition party managed to overcome the previous crisis so easily. No one got injured and the party succeeded in taking care of the monsters smoothly. The incident and the danger that happened just now were already in the past and saw the members on the front line approach the slightly depressed Park Deok-Gu to comfort him. I felt happy as I looked at that scene.

'Everyone had been rookies at one point in their lives.'

There was a time when everyone experienced hardships as rookies. No one was perfect and I was sure that this was even more so for the tanks. They were probably constantly stressed that they were responsible for protecting the front liners in their party while blocking attacks from the enemies at the same time. I was also certain that they were burdened by the fact that their mistakes could easily get their comrades killed. The person in that position had to bear all these burdens while fighting, so it wasn't unreasonable for them to feel sympathetic to someone on the

same boat as them.

“Blocking attacks is important, but it’s better to think of it as if you’re trying to let the attacks flow out, rookie,” Choi Young-Ki said.

“T-Thank you,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“No matter where you are, okay? Putting strength into your lower body is important, got it?” Choi Young-Ki told him.

“Got it, sunbae…” Park Deok-Gu answered.[1]

“In our circle, we call the situation just now as floundering… when going up against mid-sized or large monsters, everyone definitely experienced the same thing at some point in their lives. It’s already impressive that you didn’t get stabbed,” Choi Young-Ki told him.

“Stabbed…”

“That’s right. When this guy first encountered a mid-sized monster, he couldn’t even move because he was so scared,” Choi Young-Ki said.

“Hey, didn’t I tell you not to talk about that?” one of the party members said.

“Brother, the fact that you fell backward like that is proof you have courage since it means that you faced the monster head-on without getting scared, so it’s not good to be depressed. Even if you do fall, all you have to do is regain your balance and be persistent about it because I’m sure your party members aren’t weak. Trusting your comrades and enduring it until the end is important and as long as you have that mindset, you can do anything,” Choi Young-Ki said, comforting Park Deok-Gu.

“Thanks, bro…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“So hang in there.”

“Don’t fall over next time.”

“If you do, you’ll be made fun of for the rest of your life! Haha! You’ll be called a flounder, so listen carefully since I’m speaking from experience,” one of the party members said.

Seeing how they were talking to each other while calling each other sunbae, hoobae[2] and brother, I guess the community of vanguards was more closely knit than I thought. Not only were their jobs as tanks classified as a noble job, but seeing as how there weren't that many of them, I guess they formed a community where they could exchange information with each other.

For some reason, I felt pleased when I saw Park Deok-Gu being surrounded by other members with large frames. They were either patting each other's backs or flexing their muscles, so I didn't really want to join their sweaty friendship, but the sight didn't seem so bad when watching from afar. If it was me, I would have approached him differently since the world was on the side of the weak.

Park Deok-Gu must have felt better because he was smiling towards me and he looked pretty cute. "Hyung-nim!" he called out.

"Deok-Gu, go give these to those people," I told him.

"Huh?"

"They're stamina potions and they're probably better than the ones being sold on the market. It looks like they've been teaching you a lot of things, so we should repay them," I explained.

"Oh, you're right! Thanks, hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu said excitedly.

I saw Park Deok-Gu running towards the group of large-framed men; this was what you called having a social life. If I had to put a price on it, the stamina potion was less than five gold, but this was a great opportunity for us to learn many things. Park Deok-Gu had to hang out with them a bit more because that would be more advantageous for us. Kim Hyun-Sung also nodded and cheered him on.

"This is from my hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu said excitedly.

"Thank you so much for this, Mr. Ki-Young!" they said.

"This is obviously a really good potion… has this kind of potion ever been sold on the market?" one of the members asked.

"No way. There aren't even ranked potions… I guess there was truly a reason why the Blue Guild recruited an alchemist," another member said.

Of course, increasing my worth during all of this was a plus.

Anyways, the party was entering deeper into the dungeon, and while walking, the large-framed men started to teach Park Deok-Gu the ways of a tank little by little. Even when the next monsters appeared, a repeat of the previous incident didn't occur. The large-framed brothers were fighting together in the front and they were unknowingly being considerate of Park Deok-Gu. All they did was maintain the balance so that he wouldn't fall or simply pat his back, but Park Deok-Gu was getting used to fighting against the monsters. But of course, it didn't mean that he wasn't making any mistakes. As expected, he was still making small mistakes and Jung Yoo-Ra was using those as fodder. Of course, she didn't bring it up like she did the first time.

"*Whoo*…"

Instead, she sighed as if to express that she was unsatisfied.

"He seems a bit unstable."

But no one really agreed with her and her words were nothing more than an echo in the void.

"It seems a bit complicated since there's a lot of people. We could've finished it a bit sooner…" Jung Yoo-Ra said.

"Hahaha, but we're making progress safely," Choi Young-Ki said.

"I'm just saying it because I'm a bit disappointed. I think we could've done better… it just feels like we're getting held back," she commented.

"I think it's because we're not a perfect party. If we were a party that came from the same guild, then we would've been in sync, but that's not the case. I'm sure we'll get better little by little," Choi Young-Ki explained.

"Of course, we need to get better. It would be bad if we didn't since this isn't like our usual expedition," she said.

"Haha… then, we'll take a break before moving on," Choi Young-Ki said.

"Okay." Jung Yoo-Ra affirmed.

Well, that was the gist of the situation.

I started walking slowly towards Choi Young-Ki, but it wasn't because there was something I needed to talk to him about. I simply thought I was eventually going to talk to him at some point and since we decided to set up a temporary camp, I thought that this was the perfect time.

"Mr. Choi Young-Ki," I said.

"Oh! Mr. Ki-Young."

As expected, he looked happy to see me since I was the Mercenary Queen's lover.

"You're a hard worker," I said.

"Oh no, this is nothing. Please have a seat here," he offered.

"Is Miss Cha Hee-Ra doing well?" I asked.

"Hahaha, I was actually going to talk to you about her," he said.

Jung Ha-Yan was still being held up by the Devil's Guild, so I didn't think that I had to be worried about her for now.

"Our master told us several times to look after you, Mr. Ki-Young, haha," he told me.

"Oh…"

"Despite that, I'm really sorry for not being able to take care of you in many things," Choi Young-Ki said.

"No, it's understandable since you've been taking care of us in different ways… and I can't help but feel a bit uneasy about other things," I said.

"Oh, you mean…"

I was sure that he realized what I was referring to because he quietly glanced over at Jung Yoo-Ra and then continued talking after nodding quietly. "I'm sorry about the incident just now. I should've taken better care…"

“No, no. It was our party’s fault and I’m very thankful that the others are so understanding. I wanted to thank you when you blocked that monster for us,” I said.

“It was nothing. A few mistakes were made in the beginning, but all of you are adapting very well. I expected nothing less from the rookies that everyone had high expectations of. When I was in your position, I was like a child that didn’t know anything and I was only able to grow this much because our master really took care of me,” he explained.

“Hahaha.”

“I heard you and our master have been dating since you two were on Earth,” he said.

‘…’

I was a bit flustered because I heard a new piece of information, but I lightly nodded.

“She also mentioned that you helped her a lot when she was going through a lot of things… master said that you’re her savior, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” he added.

This was new as well.

“Oh… yes. I definitely remember that…”

“If you’re our master’s savior, then that makes you my savior as well. If it wasn’t for the Mercenary Queen, then I wouldn’t be here right now,” she said.

But this setup was better than I thought.

‘Thanks, Cha Hee-Ra.’

I wanted to applaud Cha Hee-Ra for coming up with such an original setting. Of course, I was a bit bothered by the fact that Jung Ha-Yan was looking this way, but I was sure that she couldn’t hear our conversation.

“You don’t have to take it so seriously. I honestly didn’t do anything to help her…”

“Hahaha, if that’s not considered as helping, then I don’t know what is. It’s no different from saving her life several times,” Choi Young-Ki said.

'What kind of bullshit is that?'

I had no idea what he was talking about, but what was important right now wasn't the past between me and Cha Hee-Ra. The fact that Choi Young-Ki, the leader of the party, had a good impression of me was the important part. I thought that he was a good person, but he was a nicer person than I thought. Seeing that he wanted to help our party somehow, I imagined that he must have considered our party as part of the Red Mercenary Guild since this expedition started. As such, we had a solid foundation to support us if a serious conflict arose.

When I saw Jung Yoo-Ra looking at us with an expression full of dissatisfaction, I couldn't help but raise the corner of my mouth. If I could yell at her, this was the time when I would say something to her.

The most important part about politics was of course…

'Taking care of people's lives.'

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1. Sunbae means senior, or more accurately, a senpai ☜

2. Hoobae means that person has less experience than you in a certain field ☜

CHAPTER 62
DUNGEON CONTROL IS POLITICS (4)

Looking after people's livelihoods wasn't difficult since it wasn't any different from what the higher-ups did back on earth. All they had to do was walk around the neighborhood and give off a friendly atmosphere, but of course, my situation was different since I couldn't say that I was above the party members. But that didn't mean that it was ineffective at all.

Whenever we took a break, shared stories, and made a camp, I worked hard in taking care of them, and I didn't forget to show them my serious side during the expedition.

Actually, the Devil's Guild was being kind to Jung Ha-Yan to the point that it seemed strange. Meanwhile, the party members of the Red Mercenary Guild were treating me kindly.

Having small conversations was effective and of course, apart from Jung Ha-Yan, I had to manage the party members of the Devil's Guild. The more people believe that being on the same side as me was good, the better.

"Hahaha, I think the effects of this potion are similar to holy magic, Mr. Ki-Young," a member of the Devil's Guild said.

"I'm flattered. I'm embarrassed that the priests will hear you," I said.

"Honestly, the firepower of your magic seems strong as well. How…"

"I feel great hearing that from a member of the Devil's Guild," I said.

"No, really. They're not just empty words. I feel that you're not so different from ordinary mages," they said.

"My weakness is that it takes me longer to recite a spell and that I need to use a magic circle, but as long as I have a decent catalyst, I can use an effective spell," I explained.

“When you talk about effectiveness…”

“I can perfect a spell with decent firepower by using a small amount of mana,” I said.

“Ohhh,” they said.

“Of course, I have my weaknesses. In order to recite a spell, I need to spend a good amount of money for the catalyst,” I added.

“Do you mind telling me how much it costs?” they asked.

“About 30 gold because I mostly use Essence of Magic,” I answered.

“Oh! Essence of Magic,” they said.

“Yes, it costs 30 golds for me to use the Essence for a lower rank magic,” I said.

I noticed that they looked a bit surprised, but more than that, they seemed a bit overwhelmed. Simply put, every time I used a spell, I was using 30 gold, so their reaction wasn’t that surprising to me. But then, I had a lot of average-ranked Essence of Magic piled up in the warehouse because I still had a lot of items that Cha Hee-Ra gifted me.

“I guess you can’t consider that as being efficient. If you use an Essence of Magic that’s above rare rank, will it disappear after one use?” the member asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“That’s a bit unfortunate.”

“If there’s an essence where I’m able to use an unlimited amount of mana, then that can be considered as a Sage’s Stone,” I explained.

“Sage’s Stone. Ohh… Sage’s Stone…”

These kinds of topics made mages go crazy.

“Can it be made?” they asked.

“It was briefly mentioned in the book that I was reading, but I haven’t officially

started my research yet. I'm still lacking in experience to officially start studying it, but I'm definitely going to make it someday," I answered.

'Sage's Stone my ass.'

"Um… when you start your research…"

"Yes, I'll be sure to show it to you since this can be considered fate too," I said, interrupting them.

Usually, these were the types of people that were suitable for the mage job. If they were interested in alchemy, then it was only natural for them to want to talk to me and with this, I was able to become close with the last member of the Devil's Guild.

Anyways, this expedition's dungeon control was going well and our party was fitting in well with the other parties. I was not sure if Kim Hyun-Sung knew what I was thinking, but we were definitely benefiting from them.

For Park Deok-Gu, he joined the community of vanguards and was learning various tips and as expected, Kim Ye-Ri also succeeded in adapting perfectly. Even though she wasn't exactly doing her part yet, the girl with pigtails was quietly pulling the bowstring.

For Sun Hee-Young, who had perfect stats from the beginning, she didn't seem to have any trouble adapting and I wasn't really struggling either. Since I used magic along with Jung Ha-Yan, my usage of magic wasn't really noticeable. And Kim Hyun-Sung, our fox, seemed like he wasn't trying to take charge. Since he wasn't the type to hide his powers, it would be right to say that there wasn't a chance for him to use his powers rather than he was trying to protect himself because the expedition was going smoothly.

"I think I'm going to use the bathroom," I said.

"Okay, I think we're going to spend the night here anyway. Later, if you don't mind, could you repeat what you said earlier? About what the Sage's Stone is… exactly…" they requested.

"Yes, of course," I said.

When I broke away from the expedition group to take care of my business, I reached

the Safe Point.

'I knew it.'

Jung Yoo-Ra quietly approached me. I expected her to make a move, but it happened a bit faster than I expected.

"I thought you came here to gain experience, not to make friends," she said.

I was a bit surprised because of how blunt she was.

'Did it bother her that much?'

I guess it could have looked like that because whenever we were taking a break, I was busy going around and trying to win over everyone. If she thought that she and I were the same, then it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that she was getting politically threatened. After all, not too long after we started the dungeon control, I succeeded in leaving a good impression on everyone.

"Haha, you have an acid tongue, Miss Yoo-Ra," I said.

"I'm saying it because you're overdoing it, Mr. Ki-Young," she said.

"I don't understand what you're saying. Isn't it natural for me to be friendly with everyone to improve our teamwork? I haven't been able to spend a lot of time with them before this," I said.

"I'm telling you this because it's excessive," she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It means that you're destroying the adequate amount of tension that is necessary for the expedition. It's not good to look so relaxed," Jung Yoo-Ra answered.

"I thought I was doing a pretty good job at keeping my place so that I don't get in the way of the dungeon control… isn't it going really well? The tank from our party that made the mistake when we had just started has adapted really well and everyone has been enjoying the expedition so far, so I don't understand what the problem is," I explained.

It was the truth.

“Look, Mr. Ki-Young,” she said. “Yes, Miss Yoo-Ra?” I asked.

“I guess you’re unaware since you recently came here, but… a dungeon is a place where you don’t know when or what kind of threats may be coming our way. Even though it’s break time, do you not realize the fact that you’re ruining the mood?” she asked.

“You’re right, I don’t. I think I’m actually helping the party because the mood improved compared to before. Just because you’re frowning doesn’t mean that the others have to do the same. I also realize that having a certain amount of tension is needed. As a matter of fact, I thought I was being serious during the expedition, so I’m not sure exactly what you’re unsatisfied with,” I explained.

When I smiled, I saw her face turning red.

It was a reasonable argument, but when I smiled as if I was teasing her, seeing her instantly react to it was funny. I wasn’t really sure, but I guess I had a face that easily provoked people.

“You’re probably not worried about the influence you have within the party… and you’re definitely not interested in being greedy over the rewards that we’ll receive after completing the dungeon control… so I don’t understand why you’re so agitated because of us. Of course, it’s only natural to be greedy over a rare-ranked item… but you’re being supported by the Black Swan Guild, so I’m sure you shouldn’t get greedy over something like that,” I said.

I was sure that I hit the bullseye.

“There’s a possibility that an epic-ranked item may appear, but… still. Don’t you think your actions are a bit petty all because you want to obtain one good gear? If it was me, I would’ve just let someone else have it. I don’t understand why you’re heavily invested in doing politics… Oh, if I misunderstood, then I apologize,” she said.

Her face was really red and of course, I would be interested if an epic-ranked gear appeared, but pretending like I wasn’t materialistic was easy to do.

“Did I hit…”

“Hey,” Jung Yoo-Ra called out.[1]

“Excuse me?”

“Do you think I’m that easy?”

“No, of course not. There’s no way I would think that about you. You’re Jung Yoo-Ra of the Black Swan Guild. But…”

“…”

“Why are you talking down on me, huh?” I asked.[2]

She looked as if I was being ridiculous, but she was immediately shocked by my sudden change of attitude. No one was here to watch or listen.

“I’m a guild member that has been registered into the official party of the Blue Guild. You shouldn’t be treating me like this, Miss Jung Yoo-Ra,” I said.

“Ha… I guess you think you have everything just because Cha Hee-Ra is supporting you. You don’t think that the Mercenary Queen is able to protect you here, do you?” she asked.[3]

“What you said just now sounds like a threat, Miss Jung Yoo-Ra. Please watch what you say. And it isn’t Hee-Ra noona that I’m relying on,’ I said.

“What?”

I took a deep breath.

She looked like she was waiting for me to continue talking, but I didn’t want to fight about it here because I had to avoid any unnecessary arguments that could ruin my image. Instead, I raised my voice a bit when I spoke to her.

“I’m sorry!”

“What?” she asked.

I had raised my voice loud enough that it could be heard by the party a bit farther away.

“You… What nonsense are you trying to pull…”

“I’m really sorry!”

When I apologized once more with a loud voice, I noticed how dumbfounded she looked. It was only natural for her to react that way because my loud voice came out at a random time. But soon, she looked as if she realized why I was apologizing. I noticed a frown on her face.

“What’s going on?”

As expected, I saw Choi Young-Ki and his friends running towards us, and not only that, but I even saw people from the Devil’s Guild, whom I just had a conversation with a moment ago, approaching us from the camp. Of course, Jung Ha-Yan, Sun Hee-Young, our party members, and the members of the Black Swan Guild approached us as well.

“I’m really sorry, Miss Yoo-Ra,” I said again.

“You…”

“Mr. Ki-Young? What’s wrong?” Choi Young-Ki asked.

“Oh… it’s nothing. It’s really nothing,” I answered.

“Yeah… it’s nothing. Nothing happened,” Jung Yoo-Ra said.

‘Bullshit… ’

“I wasn’t asking you, Miss Yoo-Ra. Mr. Ki-Young, could you please explain what happened?” Choi Young-Ki asked.

Thankfully, the lovable Choi Young-Ki of the Red Mercenary Guild started asking for details about this situation. Jung Ha-Yan looked confused about the situation, but when I looked like the victim, she seemed a bit angry.

‘What’s wrong with Sun Hee-Young?’

It was the same for Sun Hee-Young.

Pretending to be the victim was really easy to do and especially in a situation like this where there was an obvious gap in power.

“What happened, Mr. Ki-Young?”

“You see…”

“…”

“It’s nothing. I was just told to be a bit more on edge and to be careful,” I answered.

“Excuse me?”

“I guess she was unsatisfied by how I was talking with everyone during our break time… I think it’s because I put my guard down. She said that I was ruining the mood…” I continued.

“Sorry?”

“I only did it to lighten the mood, but… I guess she didn’t like it,” I said.

Everything that I said was the truth.

When I saw how shocked Jung Yoo-Ra was, I wanted to laugh.

I noticed how pale her face became.

When I revealed the truth and nothing but the truth, she looked as if the situation was incredulous.

“I’m…”

When I was about to apologize once again.

“There’s no need to apologize, Mr. Ki-Young.”

The person that stopped me was my lovely little bro, Kim Hyun-Sung.

‘Is he angry?’

1. Previously, Jung Yoo-Ra had been speaking formally and politely, but she suddenly drops all formality (banmal) and speaks casually and rather rudely ☜

2. He had been speaking formally and politely but switches to banmal with the 'huh.' ☜

3. He switched back to being formal and polite, but Jung Yoo-Ra continues to speak in banmal to him. ☜

CHAPTER 63
DUNGEON CONTROL IS POLITICS (5)

Kim Hyun-Sung definitely looked angry.

“There’s no need for you to apologize, Mr. Ki-Young,” he said.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“You’ve done nothing wrong, no, even if you did something wrong, Miss Yoo-Ra doesn’t have the right to point it out,” he said.

‘Good job.’

“Mr. Ki-Young is clearly part of the Blue Guild’s party and if I believe that you did something wrong, then I would be the first one to tell you. I don’t know why Miss Yoo-Ra thought that our party’s actions were problematic, but this doesn’t sit right with me,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

Honestly, I didn’t act that way expecting this to happen. I simply thought that manipulating the members’ opinions was the most important, but after thinking about it again, it was natural for Kim Hyun-Sung to feel displeased because Jung Yoo-Ra was clearly abusing her authority.

I was affiliated with the Blue Guild and it was Kim Hyun-Sung’s job to manage me. It didn’t make sense for Jung Yoo-Ra to point out my mistakes since she had nothing to do with me. From her point of view, she probably said it to either widen her influence or because she was a sunbae. But as someone that had been on this continent for a long time, it was natural for Kim Hyun-Sung to think that it was unacceptable. There was an implicit rule that excessive interference towards a party wasn’t allowed. Jung Yoo-Ra basically broke that rule.

‘She looked down on our party.’

This was basically a translation of what Kim Hyun-Sung was saying.

'Who the hell are you that you're messing with my party members?'

This incident wasn't similar to when she nagged Choi Young-Ki, the leader of our expedition because of Park Deok-Gu's mistake. The point was that she purposely called me out here and nagged at me. This was where the problem lay.

Kim Hyun-Sung's warm arms were a bit of a happier place than I imagined.

'This is great.'

The situation was going very well.

I was like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Pretending to act like a sheep wasn't easy, but the role suited me very well.[1]

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, I think Miss Yoo-Ra… said it… as the sunbae. I don't think that was her intention…" I told him.

"No, Mr. Ki-Young. Even if that was the case, this is too much," he said.

"I'm sure I did something wrong too…"

"I'll be straightforward. You've done nothing wrong, Mr. Ki-Young," he said.

I couldn't stop the corner of my lips from going up because I saw the dumbfounded look on Jung Yoo-Ra's face. The number of people disliking her was already going through the roof. With this small instigation, it became obvious who won the election of this politics and when I saw Jung Yoo-Ra's face, I found it difficult to hold back my laughter.

'Ha… '

During all of this, I heard people pouring words of encouragement on me. I also discovered that receiving encouragement was a lot of work.

"I guess you don't know yet since you recently came here Mr. Ki-Young, but… Mr. Hyun-Sung is right. If there was something she wanted to say to you, then she should have asked for permission from the party leader. Discreetly calling you away just to criticize you is… hard to understand," Choi Young-Ki said.

“This isn’t right. Even if he did something wrong, this isn’t how it should be done.”

“Even if the Blue Guild’s party is only here to learn because they lack experience, they’re still a party that’s doing the expedition with us. He’s not harming anyone and he’s actually doing his part very well… it’s really difficult for me to understand the Black Swan’s actions.”

The Devil’s Guild talked about the basic manners that one should keep.

“Mr. Ki-Young did nothing wrong and I actually think that he created a good mood for us. He’s actually been going about the expedition seriously…”

“Yes, I agree. Communication is important, but honestly, the Black Swan didn’t really do much for her to act that way…”

“Tsk…”

Even the emotional Red Mercenary Guild members commented.

Of course…

“I think you overstepped your boundaries. Tsk.”

“Miss Yoo-Ra, don’t you think your actions were a little too much? They’re a party that’s on the same expedition as us,” Choi Young-Ki said.

“Whew…”

Jung Yoo-Ra was receiving direct criticism from everyone. I wouldn’t have been able to create this situation if I didn’t build an elaborate design beforehand.

‘This is why one’s image is important.’

“Oppa… did you get hurt anywhere?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“No, I’m fine Ha-Yan. It’s nothing,” I answered.

“What exactly happened?” Sun Hee-Young asked.

“It’s nothing, Miss Hee-Young. What I said before was everything that happened,” I

replied.

It would've been great if she slapped me, but I guess Jung Yoo-Ra wasn't that stupid. If I said that I got slapped, Jung Ha-Yan might make plans to assassinate Jung Yoo-Ra, so I thought that this was good enough.

Anyways, the current situation placed me at a big advantage.

Jung Yoo-Ra was still frowning and people were still encouraging me. They mostly said that I didn't need to apologize and that I actually made the mood better for the group. It was a natural response because I really did energize the expedition party with my actions before this.

Honestly, I was very curious about what kind of decision Jung Yoo-Ra was going to make here, but her decision had already been decided.

'Acknowledge that you made a mistake and grovel.'

It was the best decision, but if that happened, then the result wouldn't be that great. Even though her position was already crumbling, lowering her head meant that she wasn't going to have that much influence anymore.

To convey the fact that she was trying to contribute to the party, even at the risk of being hated a little by everyone, was the right thing to do.

Basically, it was better to maintain somewhat of a position and I guess she was thinking the same thing.

"First of all, I'm sorry," Jung Yoo-Ra said.

She was going to apologize, but not with a submissive attitude.

'Dumbass.'

"Mr. Ki-Young is part of my party so I have control over him," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"I'm sorry I didn't notify you earlier, Mr. Hyun-Sung, and I apologize to Mr. Ki-Young since you probably got hurt by the sudden situation," she said.

"I think… I think I reacted a bit too sensitively, but I thought it was best to say what

was on my mind because I thought there wasn't any tension. I wouldn't have to worry about this kind of thing if the expedition party was made up of normal parties…" she said.

'Idiot.'

"Even though it was a little bit, I thought it was best for me to say something as a sunbae that had experience, but of course, I admit that my method was wrong," Jung Yoo-Ra explained.

"I don't know why you think you have the right to discipline people. I understand that we made a mistake in the beginning, but I don't think we haven't made any big mistakes after that," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"But it's true that there were small mistakes," she commented.

She was dealing with this better than I thought. This was basically what she was saying.

'I did make a mistake, but you guys made mistakes too, right? Honestly, you guys are getting carried by us, so can't you be understanding as to why I'm acting this way? You guys don't have experience and you're only here to learn. So you should have expected this at the least. Still, my method was wrong, so I'm sorry about that.'

She was quibbling, but it was a reasonable argument. She dealt with it very well to the point that if she had a favorable opinion from the parties, then she could've been elected. As expected, the Black Swan Guild started to voice their opinion.

"Honestly, the tanks are being too considerate of the Blue Guild's tank. If that wasn't the case, then this expedition would be going more smoothly. Our burden would be eased a little," they said.

"Honestly, it's difficult to say that the Blue Guild's archer is doing her part…" one member said.

"And the alchemist isn't really a combat class…" another said.

Even while apologizing, they were putting the blame on our party, and of course, there were others that disagreed.

“But you can’t say that they were getting in the way. Miss Ha-Yan’s magic helped us many times, but more than that, Miss Sun Hee-Young…”

“She assisted us a few times, but I think talking about this so soon is a problem.”

Unfortunately, it was becoming a controversial topic. This wasn’t good because I was basically placed on a meaningless hot seat. Whether it was a positive or a negative atmosphere, being on the hot seat put me at a disadvantage. Quickly putting myself down from the seat and placing the Black Swan Guild back on the seat was the priority.

When I was thinking about how I speak, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung’s serious face.

‘As expected.’

Even if Kim Hyun-Sung was reincarnated as Buddha, I was sure that he would be angry at this point. Kim Hyun-Sung wasn’t used to politics, but he was smart enough to realize that our party was getting criticized.

“I hope this doesn’t happen next time. If there’s something you want to say to my party, then please talk to me about it,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Okay, I’m very sorry, Mr. Hyun-Sung and I’m really sorry to the Blue Guild’s party for making you suffer. Especially Mr. Ki-Young, I’m really sorry,” Jung Yoo-Ra said.

“It’s nothing. I was a bit surprised though,” I said.

“I was surprised as well because I didn’t think you would be hurt by it… let’s talk in private later,” she suggested.

“It’s nothing like that. I just felt a bit flustered,” I told her.

Even though she managed to put me on the hot seat, she lost a lot too. I was sure that she knew that her political life in this expedition was over the moment she lost the public’s opinion, but I thought that maybe she had a way of turning the tables around, no, she had a *way*. It was to contribute more to this expedition.

It felt like she wanted to be a villain for the safety of the expedition party, but turning a fake villain into a real villain was a piece of cake.

'What will she do now?'

There were a lot of choices. Even though she pretended to be calm, what she had done was nothing more than dodging a checkmate.

Jung Yoo-Ra was already labeled as the most disliked person in the group and I thought that using the members' opinion would be enough to isolate her, but our Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he wasn't going to let this problem be over with a simple method.

"Could you please gather?" Kim Hyun-Sung requested.

"Okay."

The others must have realized that our party members had something to discuss because they left this spot. Kim Hyun-Sung spoke while looking at us. "First of all, I'm sorry."

"No, you shouldn't apologize for anything, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Actually…" I said.

"No. I chose this expedition so that we could learn, but I didn't think that we would be looked down on by another party," he said.

'They didn't exactly look down on us… '

"I believe all of you learned a lot…"

"We did."

"But this won't happen again," he said.

Kim Hyun-Sung was naturally a responsible person and I guess he was starting to feel angry. When I saw him bite his lips, I felt that he was thinking about something else.

"We'll change our position a bit. I'll stand in the front more and Mr. Deok-Gu, you can keep doing what you have been doing. I'll also give more instructions on when to use your magic. Miss Hee-Young, please focus on Mr. Deok-Gu more and don't worry about us. Ye-Ri, continue what you have been doing too…" Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Okay.”

“Miss Ha-Yan, you can increase your firepower since Miss Hee-Young will continue watching over Mr. Deok-Gu,” he added.

He was no pushover.

‘Ohhh.’

That was when I realized what Kim Hyun-Sung was up to. The reason why he didn’t stand on the front line was because of us and although this was just an assumption, I could feel that there were more reasons behind it. It could be to make sure that we got used to the hunt more or it could be to reduce any unknown arrogance in our hearts.

Our party was the center of attention and as we continued living comfortably, the desperation we felt a long time ago was slowly disappearing.

‘Thank you for carrying me.’

I wasn’t the only one that wanted to see Jung Yoo-Ra fall. As I looked at the regressor that tightened his grip around his sword, I nodded as if I was possessed.

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1. The original Korean proverb here was 시어머니보다 말리는 시누이가 더 미운 법 which is literally translated as ‘A sister-in-law trying to calm the mother-in-law is more hateful than the scolding mother-in-law.’ It basically means that someone is saying all the nice and caring things on the outside, but is actually trying to cause trouble on the inside. ☜

CHAPTER 64
THE RIDE (1)

"I think she took it too far," a member of the Devil's Guild said.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"I'm talking about Jung Yoo-Ra."

"Ohhh."

"*Tsk*. She's too obsessed with results… I'm sure the members under her are suffering a lot because of her," the member said.

"I see," I said.

"Don't worry about it so much. I'm sure there isn't anyone here that thinks badly of you Mr. Ki-Young. Even everyone in our Devil's Guild agrees that Jung Yoo-Ra took it too far," they told me.

"That's a relief. I was worried that I caused trouble…" I said.

"Not at all. There's always someone in the group that causes trouble. I now understand what people meant when they said that a person's true nature comes out when you go into a dungeon together. I thought she at least had some manners… I don't think we'll be working with the Black Swan Guild anytime soon, especially that Jung Yoo-Ra woman," they explained.

"The Red Mercenary Guild feels the same way."

"Looking at it from my point of view, I can somewhat understand…" I said.

"It's because you're a good person, Mr. Ki-Young. Getting involved in another party's issue is an abuse of authority. I can't believe she was stubborn until the end about how she did the right thing… a sincere apology shouldn't even be enough. Even if it bothered her, she should've handled it with words or talked to the party leader.

There are a lot of people that believe that the power of the Guild belongs to them. Excuse me for saying this, but if the Blue Guild's power was just like at its peak, Jung Yoo-Ra wouldn't dare to say anything," the member explained.

"Hahaha."

"By the way, what did she say exactly?" they asked.

"Oh jeez… I'm not sure if I should tell you…" I told them.

"Please don't worry and tell me," a member of the Devil's Guild said.

Of course, I was planning on telling them since I didn't have any reason to hide it.

"You see… she told me not to act friendly towards everyone," I said.

"What? Really? Act friendly?"

"Yes. She said… she didn't know whether I was here for dungeon control or to make friends. I just wanted to be friends with the members of the Devil's Guild… but I guess I lightened the mood a bit," I said.

"No, not at all. Wow, I can't believe she said that…" they said.

"And I'm not sure if I should be telling you this…"

"You can tell me," they said, interrupting me.

"You see… do you think the Mercenary Queen will be able to protect you here too… was what she said," I told them.

"Bitch," they commented.

I knew they were going to react a bit aggressively, but then, an unknown Red Mercenary's swordsman spoke up uncomfortably.

"S-She'll hear you," another member said.

"Let her hear us. Is she completely out of her mind? Jung Yoo-Ra must not know her place if she's talking down on the Mercenary Queen. That bitch! We're basically

invisible to her, right? Don't worry, Mr. Ki-Young. If that bitch harasses you again about this, I won't stand by and watch. How dare she… so ridiculous" the member said angrily.

"Did she really threaten you like that? I think it's only right to officially complain about her right now. Is she that bored that she would do something that a criminal would do…" another member said.

"No, I'm really fine. I don't want the issue to get worse," I told them.

"*Tsk*. I'm not sure if I'm being biased, but there are a lot of people like her with the thief or assassin job. There's a reason why people tell the thieves to patch their own injuries instead of receiving holy magic. It's all because of people like Jung Yoo-Ra," they explained.

"Hahaha…"

It was important to show that I was trying to stop them because I had to maintain my position as a victim. Though, even if I didn't take charge, the situation was already going the way I wanted.

The conversation just now wasn't the only thing that happened. After the big commotion, everyone comforted me and as if they all planned for this, they didn't hesitate to say something to Jung Yoo-Ra. She was paying a big price for putting us on the hot seat.

'Of course.'

Jung Yoo-Ra later realized the seriousness of the situation, so she started lurking around different places. Unfortunately for her, it wasn't effective because everyone found out that she said that I shouldn't be too friendly with everyone. Her method wasn't working for I worked hard to get along with everyone.

It came to the point where she wasn't able to change the other's opinions about her anymore.

'That's why it's important to be nice on a regular basis.'

It was obvious that she was trying to fix the mess she made[1]and of course, I couldn't help but laugh. It was to the point that the more she struggled, the more cold stares

she received from the members. And once it was found out that she had talked about the Mercenary Queen, the Red Mercenary Guild's members' impression of her hit rock bottom. Choi Young-Ki, who could be considered as the leader of the expedition, even told the party members to bear with it a little because a few of them became irritated and said that they couldn't continue the expedition anymore. As the mediator, Choi Young-Ki was also having a hard time.

"Okay, let's head out now," Choi Young-Ki said.

"Okay."

To summarize, Jung Yoo-Ra was losing her position within the party and in this situation, the only thing she could do was do her best in the dungeon capture, but based on the mood that Kim Hyun-Sung was giving off, I didn't think that was going to go smoothly. The most ideal situation for her would be to nitpick at any mistakes we made and say, *'I knew that was going to happen!'* The extreme case would be that she was hoping that we would make some kind of fatal mistake.

"I'll be returning to my party," a member of the Devil's Guild said.

"Okay."

The atmosphere of the party changed a bit. It felt as if they were determined not to make any more mistakes. Maybe it was because of the strange vibe that Kim Hyun-Sung was giving off, but everyone started concentrating. He definitely had the qualities of a leader because he could bring people together and change their moods.

"You don't need to be nervous, Mr. Deok-Gu. Think of it as focusing on the rear as much as possible," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Oh, got it," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Ye-Ri, the other places don't matter. Focus on the sword wounds… okay? If possible, it would be better to use it with magic," he told Kim Ye-Ri.

"Okay…" she answered.

"Miss Ha-Yan and Mr. Ki-Young, you two are doing well," he said, complimenting us.

"Thank you."

“Miss Hee-Young, you don’t have to keep your eyes on me…”

“Yes, I remember, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” she said, interrupting him.

“Great.”

The other party members were expressing their enthusiasm and it was to the point that I was hoping that the monsters would hurry up and show themselves. Eventually, we managed to leave the safe point.

Since we didn’t know when and where the monsters were going to appear, I saw the archers looking around. Even though it was called a garden, the surrounding area looked more like an enormous jungle. It was really difficult to differentiate between a plant and a monster, so it was only natural for us to keep our guard up. While I was looking around with the others, I heard Kim Hyun-Sung’s voice. “The spell.”

“Okay.”

I didn’t bother asking why I needed to recite the spell now because as long as I did what I was told, a path would open up. Jung Ha-Yan also nodded and slowly started matching my speed.

“Lord.”

“A power that can’t be taken away.”

“The power to protect.”

“Fire.”

“Wind.”

I guess Jung Ha-Yan liked how our voices were overlapping. While matching my casting speed, I saw her gathering her mana. It was like we were building our harmony so it was pretty fun. I inserted mana into a catalyst and continued building my mana.

“Let’s prepare for battle.”

Choi Young-Ki announced.

Now I understood why Kim Hyun-Sung told me to start reciting the spell because a mid-sized monster had just appeared in front of us. To make things worse, this one was bigger than the first one we saw and even though the vanguards were in the front, it seemed that they were cowering a bit.

However…

Roaaaaaar!

I trusted our regressor because that was when Kim Hyun-Sung charged to the front.

"What do you think you're doing?"

As if she was happy about what was happening, I heard Jung Yoo-Ra complaining about Kim Hyun-Sung's action, but he wasn't making a mistake. The monster was definitely looking at Park Deok-Gu and following his advice from earlier, Sun Hee-Young's holy magic was pouring towards Park Deok-Gu. Before the monster could land its punch on Park Deok-Gu, one of the monster's arms started splitting. It was obvious who injured that arm.

'Wow.'

Before he could catch his breath, Kim Ye-Ri's arrow flew towards the monster's arm, just like his suggestion earlier. It didn't take long for the monster to lose its arm. Park Deok-Gu, who was preparing to block the next attack, looked a bit surprised by the sight, but he started moving his position to the right as if he was being possessed by something. I didn't know the vanguard's situation, but in my eyes, it looked as if Kim Hyun-Sung told Park Deok-Gu where to go.

Using its other arm, the monster was about to break Park Deok-Gu's shield to crush him, but even that arm got cut off. The monster no longer had any arms and as it stood with just its body, I knew what we had to do.

"Magic."

"Fire."

"Wind!"

Matching the time when Kim Hyun-Sung opened his mouth, Jung Ha-Yan and I used

our spells. It was a collaboration between us to increase the power of my fire magic, but it was still a spell that heavily relied on Jung Ha-Yan's power.

The firestorm that appeared beneath the plant monster immediately devoured it and the monster fell apart as it released a huge scream. Park Deok-Gu looked like he was within the firestorm, but since Sun Hee-Young was watching over him, I was sure that he was going to be fine.

"Next."

'Sigh… '

Kim Hyun-Sung's stats weren't that high because there wasn't a big difference between his stats and theirs. Stats weren't the issue here. It was all about experience and having a good sense. It was difficult to describe exactly what it was, but I definitely felt that Kim Hyun-Sung was the one that was leading us. He kept telling Kim Ye-Ri, the girl with pigtails about when to shoot her arrows. It also felt like he was guiding Park Deok-Gu on where he should move to. It was also the same for me and Jung Ha-Yan. He was guiding us on how we should attack and when we should start reciting our spells, but despite that, he could still explain in detail each and every suggestion he made.

'It's here.'

That was basically what he was telling us.

The moment I quickly recited another spell, I cast the spell again when the monster showed an opening.

Before the other parties could help Park Deok-Gu, he started moving on his own as if he was possessed.

'It's not like he's been possessed by a ghost… '

This was the first time I felt that a hunt was easy.

The only thing me and Jung Ha-Yan did was recite our spells and use them. Of course, the monster's attack pattern was very simple, so it was possible for us to do that, but I just couldn't understand it. I never imagined that I would see an unusual scene where a monster would fall with just one spell. The other parties were focused on

the monster that was in front of them, but they opened their mouths wide when they saw how our party changed all of a sudden. Jung Yoo-Ra looked a bit shocked and was looking at us as if something was wrong.

'I knew that riding the regressor bus was going to be comfortable… '

Now that he was actually carrying us, it felt better than I expected and it was so comfortable that I wouldn't have any trouble changing my pants.

"Next."

'The bus is great.'

I felt like I was part of the front lines fighting the monster, so I couldn't help but start smiling.

'So this is what it feels like to be carried.'

Honestly, calling him a bus wasn't enough. But I was sure that not even a luxury sedan would be this comfortable either.

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1. The original Korean phrase used here was 소 잃고 외양간 고치는 행동 which is literally translated as 'fixing the barn after the cows have left.' A similar English saying would be 'shutting the stable door after the horses have bolted. ☜

CHAPTER 65
THE RIDE (2)

It was a situation where everyone already had their mouths opened in shock, but it was natural to show that kind of reaction. Kim Hyun-Sung's actions weren't the actions of someone who had been here for less than a year, so it didn't simply mean that he had high stats. Currently, Kim Hyun-Sung was showing movements of a person that had twice his stats. Of course, I wasn't in a position to evaluate him since I didn't have a melee job, but if even I, someone who knew nothing, could tell that there was something special about him, then there was nothing more to say about the others. It was obvious what Choi Young-Ki of the Red Mercenary Guild and the others were thinking.

'A monster.'

Or…

'A genius.'

It was written all over their faces and of course, Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't the only one that was receiving compliments. The firepower that Jung Ha-Yan and I were showing with our magic was beyond their imaginations. Honestly, I had to rely on Jung Ha-Yan for more than half of my magic, but I was able to leave a good impression on everyone when I used magic on the monsters in situations where I didn't have to set a limit.

It was the same for Sun Hee-Young, who was taking care of Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Ye-Ri, who was doing her part. At this moment, we looked like a perfectly synced team.

If I were to exaggerate a bit, it was to the point that hunting was now fun. The catharsis that I felt when everything fell in place couldn't be easily felt during a hunt and it would be shocking to feel that in the first place.

But it was interesting how the hunt could change this much when our loveable regressor took the lead.

'He's definitely different.'

At least from my standards, we were showing what a perfectly synced party looked like.

While I continued reciting the spell, I quietly glanced at Jung Yoo-Ra and saw how shocked she was.

'It's understandable.'

The hunt was the source of her unknown confidence. Despite what people thought about her, I was sure that it was part of her plan to take the villain's position within the expedition. No matter what kind of decision she made, it wasn't going to change her bad image. But since she volunteered to take the role of the villain, the dungeon control became possible. Seeing her plan falling apart made me laugh.

"Next."

After casting a spell as if I was possessed, I used the spell. Every time a large monster fell, I felt a tingling sensation inside me. The more Jung Yoo-Ra frowned, the higher the corner of my lips went up. At the end, when all the monsters in front of us fell, a strange silence filled the hall. With a dumbfounded look, I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung to confirm whether the fight just now actually happened. I guess Choi Young-Ki felt uncomfortable by the long silence because he spoke first.

"I guess there really is a genius in the party."

"You flatter me. All I did was imitate what all of you were doing," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"That's not true. I wouldn't be able to imitate anyone here and it's not simply because you have good stats. I guess describing you as a warrior with a lot of experience would be the better description. Honestly, I feel a bit ashamed towards you and your party members, Mr. Hyun-Sung," Choi Young-Ki said.

"That's…"

"I feel like your party members have changed a lot overall. Truthfully when the Blue Guild recruited you guys at an expensive price, I thought maybe they were overdoing it, but seeing all of you in action made me think that they made the right choice. I'm

sure it won't be long until the Blue Guild recovers their glory days."

"I'm embarrassed," Kim Hyung-Sung said.

"Hahaha. If you become famous later, don't forget about us," Choi Young-Ki said.

We should never forget about someone like Choi Young-Ki.

'I'll be sure to treat you well later.'

It was obvious, but Choi Young-Ki wasn't the only person that changed their thoughts about us. I felt a bit dazed, but thanks to Park Deok-Gu and Kim Ye-Ri doing well, they were receiving a lot of attention and it was to the point that we were a bit late on cleaning up the monster's corpse.

I looked through the corpse to see if there was something useful, but I didn't see anything. Within this heartwarming atmosphere, Jung Yoo-Ra was the only person that didn't look happy.

'I wonder what she's going to do next.'

I was curious about her plan because once again, she had two choices. She could either stand down in order to have a good relationship with others or stick to the attitude she had right now. Of course, in order to pick the first choice, she had to meet certain conditions. Jung Yoo-Ra needed to be thick-skinned in order to take back the words that she said and she had to throw away that pride of hers without hesitation. It looked easy, but it wasn't easy at all.

If I were her, I would be able to do it without any hesitation, but it was a difficult thing to do for normal people and it applied to Jung Yoo-Ra more because of her position. Those that were truly in a high position knew how to throw away their pride if it meant protecting the things that were valuable to them. Politicians and entrepreneurs bowed for the people.

It was none of my business whether those people called us pigs or rodents behind our backs, but they at least apologized and respected us to our faces. However, people in an uncertain position couldn't do it so easily because their own pride was the most important. As such, they would think that lowering their heads was humiliating.

It was probably my personal opinion, but people like me could probably be categorized into the first and second class at the same time.

'I wonder which side you're on, Yoo-Ra.'

She wore a complicated look.

'Are you a first-class or second-class?'

There was a frown on her face. When I saw her open her mouth slowly, I realized the fact that she was a second-class human.

'You should never become a politician.'

I was looking at a fight whose results were something that even I couldn't predict. I had been looking at this fight for so long now that I felt stupid watching this invisible fight for a long time.

"I was surprised when you suddenly jumped out," Jung Yoo-Ra said.

"What do you mean?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"If you were thinking about changing positions, isn't it only right for you to tell us first? The result wasn't that bad, but I wish you would think about our position as well," she answered.

"Miss Jung Yoo-Ra, right now…"

"Am I wrong? Mr. Hyun-Sung, because of you, our formation got messed up. Is there anyone else that agrees with me?" she asked.

"We were a bit surprised, but it wasn't so unexpected that we weren't able to handle it and it wasn't to the point that our formation broke apart just because one swordsman jumped to the front. I'm sure you at least know that much," Choi Young-Ki said.

"Of course, I'm not saying that he didn't contribute at all, but that I felt a bit dumbfounded by the situation and if he was able to move like that in the first place, then shouldn't he have done that in the beginning?" she asked.

It warmed my heart to see her talk shit like that.

“I moved cautiously before because it seemed like my party members weren’t used to the dungeon yet and Mr. Deok-Gu, along with Ye-Ri especially seemed like they were having somewhat of a hard time. But now that they’ve gotten used to it, I decided to make my move… I’m really sorry for not letting you know ahead of time,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I didn’t say it to hear an apology from you, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” Jung Yoo-Ra said.

She was giving that long speech in order to maintain that petty position of hers, but of course, no one looked at her nicely. What she said wasn’t completely wrong because it was true that Kim Hyun-Sung acted out unexpectedly and the fact that Jung Yoo-Ra had been surprised by it could also be considered true.

Right now, it didn’t matter if Jung Yoo-Ra wore Kim Hyun-Sung’s shoes. Even if she pretended that she was the victim by using her acting skills, she had already lost the chance to do so because just a few hours ago, everyone scolded her and she became the most disliked person in the group. As such, it would be strange for people to look at her in favor.

“Miss Yoo-Ra, I think you’re being a bit too harsh,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Who the hell does she think she is that she keeps acting that way?” someone commented.

“If she doesn’t want to compliment him, at least don’t discourage him… even if she’s jealous of the Blue Guild’s party, she shouldn’t have done that,” another said.

“*Tsk.* How could you say that after seeing what just happened? The one that needs to come to their senses is you, Miss Yoo-Ra, not Mr. Hyun-Sung.”

“What did you say?” Jung Yoo-Ra asked.

“I’ll repeat myself if you’d like. I’m saying it after keeping it in for so long. I don’t know what you have against us that you’re nitpicking about every little thing.”

“The things I’ve said were for the expedition,” she said.

“Bullshit… I don’t like to hear your reason.”

“You being quiet is for the expedition.”

When the Red Mercenary Guild started talking harshly, it was to the point that I felt like their actions were a bit too much. Seeing the conflict escalate made me realize that Jung Yoo-Ra’s days as a politician were over. Her face turned red and the other members of the Black Swan Guild tried to fix the situation, but it couldn’t be fixed anymore. To make things worse, Choi Young-Ki, the leader of the expedition who was the mediator, wore a serious look. Honestly, I wanted to criticize Jung Yoo-Ra in front of everyone as well, but I was limited by my position and couldn't do it. But I felt that I could at least fan the flames. I thought hard about how I should bring it up, but bringing up the truth wasn’t easy because I had to maintain my position as the victim.

Getting Kim Hyun-Sung’s approval was the first thing I needed to do, so when I glanced over at him, I saw him looking at me. Even though I didn’t ask him directly, he probably realized the fact that there was something I wanted to say because I was looking straight at him with shining eyes.

‘Hyun-Sung, this hyung of yours can say something right? Since talking is my specialty.’

When he saw the look in my eyes, I saw him nodding slowly. Since he gave his approval, I immediately spoke up. “Would it be okay if I said something?”

When I spoke up, their eyes landed on me.

“Yes, of course.”

Seeing their surprised looks was pretty amusing. Until now, it was fun to hide behind the walls of public opinion and watch her from a safe zone, but teasing and provoking her in public suited my taste more.

“I’m really sorry. I thought I was doing my best, but I think I caused a bit of trouble…” I said.

“No, that’s not true,” someone said, interrupting me.

“I’m especially sorry to the Black Swan Guild and especially to Miss Jung Yoo-Ra,” I added.

When I gave her a strange look, her expression changed immediately.

“Including Mr. Hyun-Sung, I had a discussion with our party members. I’m sure you all know by now that our party joined with the goal of gaining experience. It’s true that we’re the only party within the Blue Guild that’s able to participate in a rare-ranked dungeon, but with the party’s stats, we know that we’re only holding everyone back,” I explained.

“That’s not true, Mr. Ki-Young.”

“No, I feel very bad about this. I did my best in order to help everyone outside of the expedition, but I guess I was a bit lacking and Miss Jung Yoo-Ra seemed like she didn’t like what I was doing. My party members were all determined to do better, but watching the situation after the hunt just now, I think I know exactly what the problem is,” I explained.

I guess Jung Yoo-Ra thought I was going to point my finger at her because she looked anxious. It wasn’t a bad idea, but that wasn’t the answer. When I continued talking after releasing a sigh, I noticed how bewildered the others were.

“I think we’re creating a conflict.”

“Excuse me?”

“Oh…”

“I knew she wasn’t really fond of us, but I didn’t think she’d be this uncomfortable and we didn’t come here to create a situation like this, so… I would like to apologize to everyone here,” I said.

“It’s nothing.”

“I definitely know just how important the atmosphere of the expedition party is when they participate in a dungeon capture like this. Before entering the dungeon, I noticed that some of the sunbaes wrote something similar in their memoirs. It’s very unfortunate, but… I don’t think I can cause any more trouble and disrespect,” I told them.

“Wait, that’s…”

I heard voices of people panicking from all over the place and I honestly wanted to say my final statement, but I felt that it would be best if the party leader said it. Kim

Hyun-Sung, who was deep in his thoughts, nodded and then spoke. “I think it’s only right for the Blue Guild’s party to return.”

‘Good teamwork.’

I was very proud of the fact that he understood my thoughts and of course, the mood changed rapidly after everyone heard what he said.

“No, there’s really no need for your party to do that. It’s someone else that caused the problem…”

“You don’t have to do that. It was someone else that created the conflict…”

The public opinion that used to be my shield was now a spear that started stabbing the Black Swan Guild and as expected, Choi Young-Ki was deep in his thoughts. However, as someone that was from the Red Mercenary Guild, I thought there was only so much he was able to say.

“Your party has been helpful to us and actually, you guys are working harder than we expected. Mistakes were made, but they were understandable and it’s actually someone else that’s been creating conflict,” he explained.

‘Things are going well so far.’

“Miss Jung Yoo-Ra,” he said.

“…”

“I’m sorry for saying this and I understand that it must’ve been hard all this time, but… I think there’s something you need to understand in order for this expedition to continue smoothly,” Choi Young-Ki said.

“What are you…”

“Taking your hard work into consideration, we’ll allow you to take ownership of some of the by-products that came out from this dungeon,” he said, interrupting her.

“Are you really…”

“I would like to suggest that you leave the expedition,” he said.

The scene that was in my head was finally completed.

CHAPTER 66
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING (1)

“I would like to suggest that you leave the expedition,” Choi Young-Ki said.

The scene that was in my head was finally completed. I felt like an artist that had drawn a masterpiece.

Jung Yoo-Ra and the other Black Swan Guild party members looked dumbfounded by the situation. It was understandable why they looked that way, especially for Jung Yoo-Ra, she probably felt that this happened out of the blue. I was sure that she hadn’t realized just yet how much work I put into this behind her back.

This was what public opinion was. It may seem quiet at first, but once it caught on fire, it would quickly go out of control. This applied in situations where the victim and assailant were obvious, but it was even more applicable in this situation.

“You’re joking, right?” Jung Yoo-Ra asked.

“…”

Seeing her ask that question as if she couldn’t believe it was a sight to see because it definitely wasn’t a joke. She must have seen Choi Young-Ki’s serious look because I saw her keep her mouth shut.

“This doesn’t make sense,” a member of the Black Swan said.

“No, as the person that’s leading this expedition, it is a reasonable decision,” Choi Young-Ki said.

“Huh…”

“I understand your intentions, Miss Jung Yoo-Ra and I know how much you’ve contributed so far. I also know that you’ve worked harder than anyone else for this expedition group, but I think it’ll be difficult for us to continue like this,” he explained.

“And you suggested that I leave despite knowing that?” she asked.

“I had no other choice because it’ll be difficult to continue this expedition with the current atmosphere. I’m sure not what you think about the Blue Guild, but the attitude that you’re showing is completely absurd,” he answered.

“I said those things for the expedition group and of course, I don’t really have any ill will against the Blue Guild’s party. The actual problem is!” Jung Yoo-Ra yelled.

I was sure that she wanted to say my name, but couldn’t. When I displayed a slight smile towards her, Jung Yoo-Ra gritted her teeth. It was obvious how angry she was just by looking at her.

‘Pffft.’

Her expression was telling me that she was thinking about every curse word that existed in this world, so it was only natural for me to want to provoke her a little more.

I also didn’t forget to say something to Choi Young-Ki.

“I-It’s okay, Mr. Choi Young-Ki. There’s no need to do this.”

“No, Mr. Ki-Young. This will be better for us. A party member that creates conflict will eventually create a bigger problem, no, I’m sure they’ll create a problem,” he said.

“Are you saying that I’m the one that’s creating conflict?” Jung Yoo-Ra asked.

“Yes, and I won’t say how because I’m sure you already know,” he answered.

“That’s…”

“Your actions have been way beyond comprehension and as someone that spent a long time here, I’m sure you understand my decision. Even if you feel that your actions were reasonable, the majority of the members here find it uncomfortable to be with you. I hope you’ll make a decision for the other party members,” Choi Young-Ki explained.

“I can’t believe this… understand?” she mumbled.

It seemed like she still hadn't realized the position she was in yet because she just looked upset.

'A child like her... '

I felt ridiculous by the fact that she tried to be political. I could say this with confidence, but this woman was incompetent. Excluding her hunting skills and stats, she wasn't fit to be a leader and it was even more so when I saw how her expression took a strange turn. Her eyes became a little unusual when she looked at me and Choi Young-Ki. She was probably busy trying to find a connection between us and coming up with her own conclusion as to why Choi Young-Ki and I were looking at her that way probably wasn't going to take long.

It was because we were close to the Mercenary Queen.

"Now I understand, Mr. Choi Young-Ki," she said.

"I don't quite understand what you're saying," he said.

"I at least trusted you because I heard that you were fair and loyal, but… I guess this was your plan from the beginning, right?" Jung Yoo-Ra asked.

'Obviously.'

"Did the Mercenary Queen promise you something? To look after her sugar baby? You were thinking about kicking our guild out from the beginning, right? This is seriously ridiculous… you act all innocent and righteous, but you spit out bullshit. This was what you wanted all along? I guess the Mercenary Queen said she'll treat you well if you make a good impression on this bastard, Lee Ki-Young, huh?" she asked.

"Miss Yoo-Ra, I think you're being too harsh. Hee-Ra noona… has nothing to do with this," I told her.

'She's really delusional.'

"Shut up, you bastard," she said.

"Please calm down and be more reasonable," Choi Young-Ki said.

Seeing her raising hell was a sight to see. It was as if she was driving a broken eight-ton truck into the Blue House at full speed. I was sure that the way I spoke and my expression provoked her to the point that she became this way, but she fell into my plan better than I thought.

“It must be nice to be pampered by the Mercenary Queen with supplies and free items. Dungeon control seems like a joke to you, right? I don’t understand why you even joined the Blue Guild if you were going to act this way. Wouldn’t it be better if you had joined the Red Mercenary Guild?” she asked.

“Miss Yoo-Ra.”

The more she spoke, the worse her image was getting.

Maybe it was because it had been a while since the Mercenary Queen was mentioned, but Jung Ha-Yan looked uncomfortable.

I thought it was slowly getting to the point where she should keep her mouth shut, but it felt like her unexpected change in attitude shocked everyone. No, everyone but Choi Young-Ki looked shocked. He looked as if he was trying to calm his anger.

“Unnie, p-please stop,” a member of the Black Swan said.

“Unnie, please stop!” another yelled.

“Let go of me, you bitches. I don’t know how great the Red Mercenary Guild is, but do you think my guild is just going to stand by and watch once they find out what happens? It’s obvious that the Blue Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild are trying to oppress us! This is unfair! We need to officially protest!” she yelled.

Boom!

I noticed Jung Yoo-Ra, who was talking about unfairness, closing her mouth and it was probably because of Choi Young-Ki, who was in front of her. He had just punched the wall next to him. The way his face was shaking told us just how angry he was.

Now that I think about it…

‘Something about him being where he was now because of the Mercenary Queen… ’

I didn't really remember, but it was something like that. It was natural for our righteous Mr. Young-Ki to react this way because he respected Hee-Ra noona, yet Jung Yoo-Ra was saying crazy things about her in front of him. She was talking bullshit about how the Mercenary Queen was my pimp and was giving me free items.

I was sure that Jung Yoo-Ra didn't realize what she had said because she was worked up, but I guess she was smart enough to realize what was going on in the current situation. My legs started shaking without realizing it.

I assumed after seeing his stats, but the murderous look he was giving was causing me to choke up and Kim Hyun-Sung must have discovered my situation because when he extended his hand out, what I felt earlier started to disappear.

"Oh, thank you," I said.

The way Choi Young-Ki reacted was way beyond the reaction that a person would make when someone talked badly about their leader. Cha Hee-Ra was probably more popular than I thought based on his reaction and I wanted to compliment him for not swinging his sword right away in this situation.

'I kind of want him… '

If Park Deok-Gu wasn't here, I would have thought of a way to bring Choi Young-Ki to our party. Despite being this angry, the fact that he was able to control himself was proof that he wasn't the type to lose his head.

Jung Yoo-Ra was shocked by the murderous look she was getting, which caused her to fall silent. Based on her stats, she had the ability to resist this energy, but apart from that, I was sure that she had realized the mistake she made.

'That's great.'

It was like a bomb was about to explode and during all of this, Choi Young-Ki spoke calmly. "Are you done talking?"

"That's…"

"I would like for you to leave right now," he said.

"I overreacted and I'm sorry about what happened just now, but…"

“I told you to leave right now! I don’t want to hear anything else from you and as I’ve mentioned earlier, I’ll make sure you get your share,” he said, interrupting her.

“I…!”

Boom!

We heard it again.

“I asked you to leave,” he said.

‘Nice.’

I noticed how pale her face became. Even though all I could do was grin, it felt very gratifying. It was to the point that I felt goosebumps on my back and I was sure that this was more than enough to describe my feeling.

“Please leave the dungeon immediately, Miss Yoo-Ra. The Devil’s Guild doesn’t want to work with you anymore either.”

The party leaders were speaking formally in front of me to be respectful, but the voices I heard behind me were a bit scary.

The way they cursed while screaming reminded me of a modern-day witch hunt. They weren’t throwing rocks at her, but that woman was basically at the stake which meant that the woman had also become a witch. I was sure that she wanted to scream out that she wasn’t a witch, but the public wouldn’t stop throwing rocks at her. Jung Yoo-Ra must have felt really dejected because blood came out from the lips she was biting down on as tears even rolled down from her red eyes. She looked like she was trying her best to hold back her tears, but doing that wasn’t going to solve this.

‘Nice.’

Watching the situation from afar always gave me a sense of release, especially if the situation was created by my own hands.

A few moments later, I noticed Jung Yoo-Ra quietly passing by me and the way she glared at me made it seem like she had a grudge that was beyond my imagination. When I smiled in that short moment, I felt her hit my shoulder as she passed by me

and she hit me so hard that my body was pushed back a little.

'Oh man… '

Of course, I didn't feel threatened or scared of her. Since I was the type that felt reassured after seeing the end of a problem that I was involved in, I needed to think about what was going to happen after this. The crazy girl could stab my back because of the grudge she had, so I had to be more detailed in my plans.

I had seen many cases where people lost their lives because they said one wrong thing and even though it should only apply in modern society, I assumed it was the same here. As such, it was only natural for this situation to go the way I wanted it to go.

Getting into more arguments with her was no longer a political fight. It was one-sided harassment and in some ways an expensive lesson.

'For this chapter… '

Out of the two most important things in politics, there was still one left.

"Let's get going," Choi Young-Ki said.

"Okay."

"I'm sorry for making you all uncomfortable," he said.

"It's fine. We're actually…"

It was about the media.

'I'm sure she thinks it's over.'

But… I was more ruthless than she thought.

CHAPTER 67
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING (2)

[Rare-ranked dungeon, Garden of Horror Dungeon has been completed. Confirmed [18/30] people.]

I heard a familiar voice and the voice sounded really happy. It was only a bit, but I could see the sense of accomplishment written on everyone's faces. When I saw that, I started talking to Choi Young-Ki. It was simply about my first impression of the dungeon and nothing special.

"Are rare-ranked dungeons usually like this?"

"Yes, it's pretty simple. We are basically done with the dungeon control once we take care of the monster and the boss monster. From what I've heard, epic and legendary ranked dungeons have several conditions for their dungeon controls… it's embarrassing, but I still haven't entered one myself," he answered.

"Ohh."

"There has only been one time where a legendary-ranked dungeon was discovered within the Holy Empire," he said.

"Oh, I see. Are there a lot of epic-ranked dungeons?" I asked.

"There aren't that many epic-ranked dungeons either. Even this Garden of Horror dungeon seems like a lower-tier dungeon among the rare-ranked dungeons and the construction of the other dungeons may be a bit different compared to this," he explained.

"I see," I said.

"Anyways, I'm sorry you had to experience something so uncomfortable during the expedition," he said, apologizing.

“It’s fine. We actually feel really bad about it,” I said.

I noticed Choi Young-Ki slightly lowering his head and seeing his face made me realize that he was genuinely apologizing. He seemed to feel really bad about the unexpected accident. A part of me felt bad about the situation too, but I couldn’t express it, so I simply smiled and denied it.

“Thanks to you, I was able to have a good experience and now I understand a little bit about dungeons. I obtained a good item too…” I said.

“It’s nothing. I believe you did enough to receive the item and not only the Red Mercenary Guild, but I’m sure the Devil’s Guild feels the same way. I actually feel bad that I wasn’t able to take care of you more,” he said.

“Hahaha.”

When I glanced to the side, I noticed Kim Hyun-Sung talking to the members of the Devil’s Guild and I was sure that he was having a conversation similar to what Choi Young-Ki and I were having. Like, thanking them for everything they had done or promising to have a meal with them later.

Considering the atmosphere of the party after Jung Yoo-Ra left, I think we would be gathering again sometime soon. The original party wasn’t bad, but once Jung Yoo-Ra, who was a thorn in everyone's side, disappeared, the expedition party gained momentum and of course, the atmosphere became more peaceful than before.

I remember laughing all throughout the hunt. Obviously, Jung Yoo-Ra’s departure played a big part in the unification of the party, but there had been a different problem when they were still around.

The Black Swan’s overall endurance stat was low, so the Red Mercenary Guild’s burden increased with them in the group. But since they no longer had to worry about that, the vanguards of the Red Mercenary Guild aggressively took charge, and the priests in each guild were able to focus more on their tasks.

Basically, the reason why Jung Yoo-Ra talked big all throughout the expedition was revealed, and it was because she realized the fact that her party wasn’t suitable for the dungeon control. Even if the dungeon control was completed normally, she wouldn’t have gained much. If I were to simply calculate the gains and losses, her departure in the middle of the expedition was a gain for her since she would obtain

the reward without having to do anything, so I was sure that she was really happy about this.

“By the way, are you really okay?” Choi Young-Ki asked.

“Sorry?” I asked.

“The items that were distributed to the Black Swan Guild,” he answered.

“Ohh, yes, you don’t have to worry since Mr. Hyun-Sung said that it would be best to keep the original distribution ratio,” I said.

“Still, the Blue Guild contributed a lot, so I thought it would be best to give your party a bit more…”

“The shield that Deok-Gu obtained was more than enough. I even feel a bit burdened because it feels like we’re getting more than what we deserve,” I explained.

When I slightly turned my head to the side, I saw Park Deok-Gu surrounded by his tank sunbaes and he looked really happy. Out of the rare ranked items, the shield was categorized as a high-tier item, so I guess that made him happy. The shield was the most valuable item out of all the items we obtained from this expedition.

[Root Shield - Rare Rank]

[Araki, the owner of the garden, created this strong shield using the roots of a plant. The shield was originally meant for the guard that protected the garden, but when every human in the garden fell to the curse, the shield was never used. Not only does it increase one’s defense, but it also softens external blows. The durability can be restored by the user.]

[Stamina +3]

[Endurance +2]

[Magic +1]

'Not bad.'

The fact that the user could restore the shield's durability themselves was what I liked about it the most. It felt like a cost-effective beginner's gear.

The stats were great, so I was sure that Park Deok-Gu's growth was going to gain momentum. Normally, the shield would have to go through many opinions before finding its owner, but all the vanguards expressed that the shield should be passed on to Park Deok-Gu. It seemed like it was their own way of welcoming him, but Park Deok-Gu was very lucky to have obtained an item of that rarity from his first expedition and it was to the point that I thought maybe it was part of his plan to look pitiful from the start.

There were other items as well.

The story of the Garden of Horror was that it was a man-made laboratory, but after being cursed by God, everyone turned into monsters.

There were Essences of Magic and other items that were worth researching and they were all very valuable items. This was the moment where I understood what people meant when they said people could make money through dungeon control.

Because we did well during the expedition, the Red Mercenary Guild and the Devil's Guild tried to give us many of the items, but excluding the items that we really needed, Kim Hyun-Sung expressed that it was only right for them to split it amongst themselves, so I had no choice but to nod. From Kim Hyun-Sung's point of view, those items weren't really necessary for us and it was an obvious choice to split them with the others in order to build a friendship with them for the future, but from my point of view, it was a bit disappointing. The only problem we had was the portion that was going to go to Jung Yoo-Ra, a member of the Black Swan Guild that was kicked out in the middle of the expedition. It had been a hot topic within the expedition group for a long time, but after considering the Black Swan Guild's honor, they agreed to distribute it based on the proportion that was agreed upon.

"To be honest, I think it's a bit much for me. I think it's only right for the Blue Guild to take more since they displayed a reasonable performance… If you think you might feel burdened about this later, you don't have to worry. I'll do…" Choi Young-Ki said.

"No, It's not like that. Hahaha. You mentioned a few times that Miss Jung Yoo-Ra was

the one that was creating the problem, but personally, I think our party was partly at fault too. Like when Deok-Gu fell in the beginning and when we made small mistakes here and there," I said.

"That's…"

"It's understandable for her to be angry and I'm sure she feels a sense of loss since she had to leave in the middle of the dungeon. Wouldn't it be better if she felt comforted by the rewards even if it was a small amount?" I asked.

"Hahaha, you're embarrassing me. I feel like a fool for calculating the profit and loss over a few times. I'm sure there isn't a person as warm as you in the free city of Lindel, Mr. Ki-Young. As someone that's been called the Saint of the Forsaken a long time ago, I think I understand why Miss Sun Hee-Young joined the Blue Guild," he explained.

"You flatter me."

Honestly, I was being calculative more than anyone, but I didn't see a reason to reject his compliment. I did feel a bit guilty for suggesting to give the Black Swan Guild a bigger reward because that suggestion was only made after I calculated the potential gains and losses. In the end, the Black Swan Guild's share was going to be handed to us anyways and of course, just thinking about it made me smile, although I didn't express it outside.

"Is it okay for us to return to our guilds now?" I asked.

"Yes. For the materials that haven't been settled yet, they'll be settled and distributed within a week. You'll also receive a document that will prove the ownership of the dungeon that's been captured," Choi Young-Ki answered.

"Ohh."

"The document isn't really worth anything though… haha. But it's still better to have one than not. We'll be heading back now. I would like to take a break since it was such a long expedition," he said.

"Yes, be careful on your way back. I'll contact you later on," I told him.

"I'll contact you first. Don't forget our promise to have a drink together," he said.

“I won’t, haha. I’ll be waiting,” I said.

I noticed everyone talking to each other and it was a heartwarming sight. I briefly thought that maybe this was possible because Jung Yoo-Ra wasn’t here and after thinking about how this was what a true unity should be, I became emotional.

The party members continued walking and when everyone started splitting up after arriving in front of the Free City of Lindel, I realized that we were part of different groups, but it was irrelevant.

Through this expedition, we confirmed each other’s trust and as long as nothing happened to this group, we would probably stay together until the end.

Both my party and I looked happy. I noticed happy looks on the faces of Kim Hyun-Sung, who gave us the opportunity to experience this, Park Deok-Gu, who was really happy with his new shield, and even Kim Ye-Ri. It was also the same for Sun Hee-Young, who wasn’t able to do any charity work, and Jung Ha-Yan, who had a bit of a hard time because we couldn’t have any alone time.

After exchanging useless conversations, we arrived at the Blue Guild’s guild house and it was a place I could now call home. I felt a bit bewildered, but it was fun as well.

Reporting to the guild receptionist and writing a report about the dungeon was required. It was obvious, but we had to meet Lee Sang-Hee, the sub guild master. We had to discuss the exact share and calculations. Since we were part of the Blue Guild, the items we obtained in the dungeon had to be shared with the guild under the agreed-upon condition, and I didn’t have any complaints about it. After all, if it wasn’t for the Blue Guild, we wouldn’t have had the chance to experience the dungeon and I was actually thankful that I became a part of it.

The small to medium-sized guilds were probably in a frustrating situation where they weren’t even given this kind of opportunity, but there was something else I thought was most important.

“Ha-Yan.”

“Yes, oppa.”

“Let’s talk for a bit,” I suggested.

“Huh? Okay!” she said.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung, I’ll be heading upstairs first. Deok-Gu, you can eat first and Miss Hee-Young, I’ll see you later,” I said.

They all nodded. Park Deok-Gu did look at me with a cunning expression, but I ignored it and immediately brought Jung Ha-Yan to my room. After seeing her red face, I realized that I did something that could easily cause a misunderstanding, but I didn’t bring her here in order to resolve a human’s basic desire that I had been suppressing while in the dungeon.

When I opened the door and entered, I noticed Jung Ha-Yan looking around.

“O-Oppa.”

“Ha-Yan.”

“Yes?”

“Can I ask for a simple favor?” I asked.

“Of-Of course. Yes! You can do whatever you want. All… All of it!”

‘What’s wrong with her… ’

“I’m fine with everything. Whatever you want! I’m ready for everything. I’m ready!” she yelled.

I was thinking that it suddenly became harder to bring up the topic. I also started to feel bad because she looked as if she was really expecting something. But I had no choice; I had to talk about it because it was the most important thing right now.

“Can you find some information about the press within Lindel?” I asked.

“Oh…”

As expected, Jung Ha-Yan was disappointed, but when I placed my face close to hers, her body froze up. When I lightly kissed her cheek to express my gratitude, I noticed her trembling.

“Okay…” she answered.

I noticed her nodding as if she was possessed.

‘Good.’

She would get a reward if she showed results. This was the promise we implicitly made between us and she remembered it, right at this moment.

CHAPTER 68
THE PRESS (1)

The press within the Free City of Lindel couldn't be called the press. At least, that was the conclusion that Jung Ha-Yan came up with. There were a lot of people that wanted to write and everyone that lived in a democratic country wanted freedom of the press. But the social system was already set in Lindel, so the press couldn't just write articles they wanted.

'Because it's scary.'

Armed forces basically ruled this continent. Seeing a few people die was normal and everyone knew the price they would have to pay if they went against large guilds. I was sure that the press was very cautious about writing even one article. Not only was going against those with power not allowed, but whenever they had to write an article about a murder case, they had to think about it a lot because the crazy murderer could read the article and attack the press clan.

When I first laid my eyes on the newspapers being sold in Lindel, I was confused. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that there wasn't anything that could be considered as an article. The majority of them were announcements about various things and there was even an article about what the head of a large guild ate for breakfast. I was sure that they were ashamed because they were writing things like these instead of actual news. But of course, the need for money and selfishness would always trump shame. In addition, they knew how things worked around here.

They were the type of press that was often called garbage, but the city needed people who could follow the times. Honestly, their backgrounds weren't that bad. It was different from the Lindel that I heard of a long time ago because the city's system was close to completion in their setup. Back then, people said that hunting was the only way to make a living, but it was different now.

People with money enjoyed the city's culture and there were many guilds that invested in restaurants and theaters. The large and mid-sized guilds were now in a situation where they had to watch the public's reaction, so they could be considered fortunate in some ways. If I had been summoned here when Lindel was just being

built, I would find it hard to even think about this.

People were generally interested in hearing stories about other people and simply put, there had to be something to relieve people of their boredom. Thinking about the number of people inside, I came to the realization that many people agreed with my idea. No, people would gather here naturally because this was their bread and butter.

“Oppa, I think most of them are here,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Oh yeah?” I asked.

“Yes, there are a few people missing, though… what should I do?” she asked.

“Let them be. If this works out, then they’ll follow. More than that, thanks a lot, Ha-Yan,” I said.

“I-It was nothing,” she said.

“I’ll be sure to reward you once this is over,” I told her.

“Okay!”

It was thanks to Jung Ha-Yan’s help that I was able to achieve this much in a short period of time.

When I entered the room after lightly kissing her lips, I noticed the people that gathered. Before I walked in, I was sure that it was noisy in here, but seeing them quiet down a bit was amusing. It was probably because they were trying to read my face, but I couldn’t make it obvious that I noticed what they were trying to do. I slightly smiled and greeted them.

“Nice to meet you,” I said.

“Oh… nice to meet you.”

“I’m Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Lindel Daily Report,” he said.

“It’s really nice to meet you. My name is Lee Ki-Young from the Blue Guild.”

They seemed more interested in how much they were going to get paid rather than the reason they were called here. It was understandable since this was the only way they could make money in Lindel.

I greeted everyone and when a decent meal was served, I noticed their faces brightening up. I could go straight into the point, but spending time like this was important as well.

“I’m sure it’s obvious, but the reason why I called you all here is that I would like for you to write a small article for me,” I said.

“That’s what we expected. Hahaha. Of course we’ll write about it since the Blue Guild’s value is at its highest recently. We’re glad that we can actually promote the guild,” someone said.

‘Promote my ass.’

Even if they wrote an article, it wasn’t effective when it came to promotions since the articles they wrote didn’t have even the tiniest bit of influence.

“I heard that you managed to complete the tutorial dungeon at record time with only four people and have successfully completed the Garden of Horror dungeon control expedition as well. We’ll be able to write a nice article about it,” another one said.

Of course, the news wasn’t really a good source of information since the people already knew which parties controlled which dungeons without having to read an article. To be honest, it would be more effective if the guild promoted itself.

“Hahaha. If you tell us how we should write the article, we’ll do our best to fulfill it.”

The reporters that were saying things like that were the ones that were currently leading the press of Lindel. Of course, I liked what they said because those words were exactly what I wanted to hear from them.

“To be honest, the article that I would like for all of you to write is different from what you’re thinking,” I said.

“Excuse me?”

“I would like for you to write an article about Jung Yoo-Ra from the Black Swan Guild.

The article will be about…" I told them.

I started explaining the content of the article very slowly and I didn't add anything or exaggerate anything either. All I did was explain everything that happened in the dungeon, but the faces of the reporters in front of me started to turn serious. Their reaction was what I expected. Even though they didn't say it, I had an idea what they were thinking.

'I don't want to commit suicide.'

Or…

'I want to live longer.'

These were probably what they were thinking.

"It doesn't matter if you write exactly what I told you or not. I'll leave it up to you if you want to exaggerate it a bit. Personally, I'd appreciate it if you could write a provocative article since the public enjoys articles with provocative content. Of course, I'll pay you handsomely with gold," I explained.

"…"

"…"

I knew that the hall would become quiet since this was the reaction I expected from them.

"Well, I think that'll be difficult to do…" someone said.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"I don't think I'll be able to write an article like that. I kind of have an idea as to what is your intention in wanting us to write this article, but… the content is a bit…"

"I'm not asking you to write an article about the Black Swan Guild. I want you to focus on Jung Yoo-Ra more than the guild…" I explained

"But still…"

The way they looked at each other was a sight to see. They started to avoid answering me and some of them might even be thinking right now that being here was uncomfortable. If I wasn't Lee Ki-Young of the Blue Guild, then a few people would have yelled at me already, and maybe they would have already mocked my request by saying that it was ridiculous before stomping out in fury.

"I know what you're all worried about," I said.

"Huh?"

"Your safety. I know you're scared of any possible retaliation, but you don't have to worry about that. I'm not telling you this without a plan in mind. Rather than saying that this was what I want…"

"It's what Miss Cha Hee-Ra wants," I said.

Of course, I lied.

"If you're scared despite that, then I can understand that too because I'm sure you're afraid of not only the Black Swan Guild, but Jung Yoo-Ra's personal retaliation. Even if the Mercenary Queen will protect you, I know that it's still not an easy decision to make," I added.

"…"

"But if you have decided to write an article, it'll be written with your real name," I said.

"Oh…"

"I'm sure some of you are considering the impact that the article will have once it comes out and no matter what, writing an article that criticizes a large guild will create a large impact. People will start to become curious as to how this even happened in the first place. The sales will increase to the point that it can't be compared to the previous sales figures and all of you will receive just as much gold as I'll pay you for the article," I said.

"Gold isn't the…"

"The more people read your article, the safer all of you will be. The more you sell

articles or columns that have your name on them, the more influential all of you will be," I told them.

Some of them started to understand the ramifications and it was expected because they also worked as reporters back on earth.

"Just because they're a powerful guild doesn't mean that they don't care about the public's opinion. Large guilds consider the public's eyes as important because they can't just act on their own accord considering how many things they need to protect. The social system in Lindel has already been set somewhat. The era of simply hunting and going into dungeons to earn money has passed," I explained.

They looked as if they understood, but they didn't seem like they were willing to do it.

"Even if that's true, I still feel a bit anxious. No, being in this place is actually very uncomfortable," someone said.

"The Red Mercenary Guild is supporting all of you so there's no reason to be scared. Miss Cha Hee-Ra has also considered the ramifications of this matter and has made a decision," I said.

"But writing an article with our real name is…"

"That's the important part. If something happens to you, the Black Swan Guild will have a hard time avoiding the criticism. Yes, it'll be difficult," I said.

I noticed that the reporters were becoming slightly anxious. I could understand it because they had to be worried about the smallest things considering the positions they would have to take. Even if the Red Mercenary Guild had their backs, writing an article against a large guild was still a scary endeavor.

After releasing a light sigh, I continued. "Why do you think the media outlets in Lindel haven't been able to work actively all this time?"

"Because of… retaliation…" someone answered.

"Yes, I'm sure you were afraid of the retaliation and that's why all of you have been writing articles that were below the standards. Of course, I'm not criticizing or insulting the work you've done up until now since you had no choice but to write

them. I understand that Lindel is a place that's controlled by people with power, so it's not easy to write the articles that you want," I said.

"Yes."

"But that's not the answer."

"Excuse me?"

"Since the continent is a place controlled by the strong, many media outlets aren't able to do their jobs properly, so that isn't the answer. It's not even a good excuse," I said.

"…"

"The biggest problem is that all of you haven't decided on a stance and I'm sure that the people that worked as reporters back on Earth know what I'm saying. The fact that the media outlets haven't properly decided on a stance is the most important. Which side are you going to stand on? Which side are you going to take? If I were to compare it to politics, it's like asking if you are going to side with the ruling party or the opposition. The work of the media outlet provides a lot of strength in situations like this," I explained.

"Are you asking us to side with the Blue Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild?" someone asked.

"Yes, of course. You just need to write the articles that we need. Media outlets will never be completely free, but you can be half free. Just half. All you have to do is criticize the Blue Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild's enemies, advocate for us and make the public's opinion move according to our will. You won't be at a disadvantage if you decide to stand on the other side either. If you choose to side with the Black Swan Guild or if you're given the opportunity to change your stance to a different guild, then you can go to them. Of course, your life may be threatened, and receiving outside pressure will become a daily thing, but that applies to everyone living in Lindel. People that have to enter a dungeon or stand on the front lines all put their lives on the line," I said.

"Oh…"

"The more you're threatened, the better your reward will be," I added.

“That’s…”

“Gold,” I said.

“…”

“And.”

“…”

“Power.”

Of course, it wasn’t that they would really have real power, but I could make them think that. When I saw them nod with a blank stare, I bowed again and spoke. “Thank you very much for joining me.”

CHAPTER 69
THE PRESS (2)

I[1] felt very angry at the thought that I was being played by that scumbag.

Looking back at the situation, they were right. During that time, I was overly furious. I didn't understand the situation properly and didn't think about the atmosphere of the expedition group. While the scumbag was building the public's opinion about him, I didn't do anything I wanted to protect my pride.

I couldn't come back to my senses because the way he spoke messed with my temper and the way he licked his lips made me feel like it was piercing into my heart. I was relieved that I managed to hold back my urge of stabbing the dagger that I was holding into his neck. Just thinking about it made it seem like blood was going to spill from my clenched fist and arguably, I've never seen or heard anyone like him in this continent.

'Disgusting bastard.'

Based on the amount of mana I felt from him and his job, Lee Ki-Young was definitely a type of person that was labeled as weak on this continent. He was the type of person that would beg while wandering around the slums and someone that would spend all his earnings for the day to survive. He would also have to snoop around because he couldn't find a party that would take him in.

It was ridiculous how that piece of trash who wouldn't dare say a word to me would just run wild like that all because of his background. I've never seen someone with a thicker face than him.

He constantly apologized, but the expression on his face was telling me a totally different story. I was sure that the party members that went on the expedition with me had remembered his face. It felt like he was showing his contempt towards me by ignoring and provoking me. When I recalled that look on his face again, I started getting angry without realizing it.

"Damn it…"

I was cooling off my anger while lying down when I heard a voice from outside.

“Yoo-Ra unnie.”

“How is it?” I asked.

“I-It’s the same. There hasn’t been any other news…” she answered.

“Ha…”

“They said that it’s still too early to formally protest,” she said.

“It doesn’t make sense that they’re still trying to figure out the situation when so much time has passed,” I expressed my doubt.

“B-But…”

“Since when did our guild start caring about what others think? I’m sure there’s some sort of connection between the Red Mercenary Guild and the Blue Guild. Turning them upside down won’t even be enough so what exactly does a guild do for its members? Large guild, my ass! They’re nothing more than the Red Mercenary Guild’s sidekick,” I said with contempt.

“They said to stay quiet and refrain from acting rashly because they thought it would only be best to make a move after finding out exactly what happened. They can’t help but be worried about Cha Hee-Ra,” the girl explained.

“What about Cha Hee-Ra?” I asked.

“It seemed like the guild’s executives met with the Red Mercenary Guild for a meeting,” she answered.

“What more do they need to know about? Isn’t what we wrote in the report exactly what happened?” I got agitated.

“T-That’s true, but…”

“Also, what’s the point of finding more about the situation with the bastards that started the problem? It’s obvious that the Black Swan Guild is being cautious of the Red Mercenary Guild, but do they even realize the fact that we’re starting to look like

morons to the rest of Lindel? What do you think the other large guilds will think about us? And it's not like they're lowering their heads at that prostitute Cha Hee-Ra, right? They're just being controlled by that fox! Shit. Lee Ki-Young, that bastard!" I ranted.

"What can you do? There are rumors that he's Cha Hee-Ra's lover… I don't know the details, but I heard their relationship existed since they were still on Earth. That's how close they are! Even Cha Hee-Ra went as far as sacrificing her reputation for him and we also have a symbiotic relationship with the Red Mercenary Guild… I-I don't think there's much we can do in this situation. It's not like I don't understand how you're feeling, but…" she said.

"What?"

"I think it's best to watch the situation a bit. I'm sure the chance for us to take revenge will come," she suggested.

"Yeah, it has to come," I said.

"Yes."

"I'm not planning on putting an end by simply returning what I received. I'm going to make him experience a painful death until he cries and begs for his life. He probably thinks that Cha Hee-Ra is going to protect him for a long time, but let's see how long that trust lasts…" I said.

"Y-You're right," she stuttered.

"A lot of accidents happen during expeditions, right?" I asked.

"Yes, b-but right now…" she hesitated.

"I already know. It's just… it's hard to endure it," I answered.

"I-I'm sure you'll be able to do what you want with him after seeing the items that have arrived. I don't think they're completely looking down on us. I think you can consider it as them wanting to resolve the problems that occurred in the dungeon," she explained.

"Oh yeah?" I asked.

“Yes. There are a lot of rare-ranked weapons and they gave us a lot more materials than I thought. After looking at the distributed item list, I think we received a lot more than the Blue Guild…” she answered.

“Of course, hahaha! Even if they’re from the Red Mercenary Guild, they should still be wary of us,” I said.

“I think they were at least trying to be sincere. H-How about we go out and eat instead of staying here? I think it’s best to freshen yourself…” the girl suggested.

“Okay,” I responded.

“I heard that a nice restaurant has recently opened up. Let’s go there, unnie,” she said.

I started walking as if I was being forced to go.

Honestly, I was starting to think that I needed to get some fresh air anyway. If I stayed in my room, I would just keep on thinking about that bastard’s sly face. I knew that even if I got mad, I wouldn’t be able to do anything about it. But my chance would definitely come.

Even if the Blue Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild had a strategic alliance, they wouldn’t be dumb enough to directly abandon the Black Swan Guild since we were labeled as a large guild. In short, maintaining this status quo would be the best course of action.

For some reason, I started to feel better. If what Park Eun-Hye told me earlier was true, then the Red Mercenary Guild was at least being sincere, so I was sure that my previous thoughts were right.

When we started walking, it only took us a moment to exit the guild. The surroundings were noisier than usual, but the scenery of the free city was still the same. Then I suddenly discovered a group of people in the plaza.

“Jeez… do scumbags like them really exist?” someone asked.

“Of course! I can even imagine the situation with my eyes closed…” said another person.

"*Tsk.*'

The voices that I heard didn't sound very pleasing and the way people looked at me from time to time wasn't pleasant either.

One thing the people had in common was that they were all holding a newspaper, which was a rare sight. The press didn't have a lot of power in Lindel since all they really wrote about were new monsters or news about the Holy Empire. As such, the adventurers within Lindel weren't really patronizing the media.

The way the people gathered and were reading the newspaper definitely seemed odd, so of course, I became curious. I did feel anxious for some reason, but I couldn't help but grab the newspaper that the store was selling.

"U-Unnie…"

"This is…"

[Cause a Stir.]

[After the Blue Guild paid a lot of money to recruit Kim Hyun-Sung's party, they successfully completed their first dungeon expedition. Everyone remembers the four-person party that completed the tutorial dungeon in record time. This party, known as the Kim Hyun-Sung party, left Lindel a few weeks ago with the Devil's Guild, the Red Mercenary Guild, and the Black Swan Guild as if they were showing their friendship with the other large guilds.

While people voiced concerns and criticism about whether they were getting carried, the Devil's Guild revealed their dungeon capture log and caused a stir. It was revealed that Miss Jung of the Black Swan Guild participated and excessively abused her power.

When the expedition party that started together ended up arriving in Lindel separately, there were rumors about whether there was a problem within the expedition party, but when that rumor was proven to be true, the other guild members were shocked.

The truth of the rumor started before the party left when Miss Jung (29), created

conflict within the party by threatening Mr. Lee of the Blue Guild's party. When people heard several testimonies about how Miss Jung of the Black Swan Guild severely oppressed the Blue Guild, they couldn't help but frown.

As the person that was directly involved, when Mr. Lee was asked what kind of threats he received, he didn't say much because he was aware of the perpetrator's identity. As such, rumors about there being physical pressure involved started to spread.

Experts assumed that the problem was in the distribution of the dungeon items based on the level of contribution, but there has been no information of this yet as of writing.

The Blue Guild and the Black Swan Guild have kept quiet about this, but this case has drawn many people's attention. After all, the dungeon control with the cooperation of other guilds is a fact that is widely known in the Free City of Lindel.

A problem seemed to have occurred with the item distribution as well as the level of contribution. But everyone knows that issues like this happen because of greed. Even though the oppression of large guilds on mid-sized guilds and small clans has long been a natural part of our lives, it had been a long time since the Free City of Lindel was founded. Isn't it time for large guilds to be leaders in creating a wholesome dungeon control culture? - Reporter Kim Seong-Kyung of the Lindel Daily Report]

'What?'

It didn't stop there.

[Miss Jung's (29) Controversial Remark - Do You Think the Mercenary Queen will Protect You?]

[The remarks that Miss Jung made in the rare-ranked dungeon are starting to get revealed, it's causing a big stir within Lindel. The comments that Miss Jung made to the alchemist, Mr. Lee, who everyone knows as the Mercenary Queen's lover, has started to become a problem. Apparently, Miss Jung saw that Mr. Lee's party was performing well in the dungeon control, but she still called him over to the side and

threatened him for some reason. Her comments are now being re-examined.

Not only did she insult him by calling him the Mercenary Queen's sugar baby, but it was also revealed that she made a comment about whether the Mercenary Queen will be able to protect him.

A large guild pressuring a mid-sized guild. People have voiced their opinions that not only were the comments targeted at Mr. Lee, but she was also being conscious of the Red Mercenary Guild's Mercenary Queen. Now, everyone has their focus on the direction that the Red Mercenary Guild and the Black Swan Guild are going to take in the future. - Middle East Daily Report]

I kept on seeing annoying titles.

[About the Black Swan and the Red Mercenary Guild's Relationship - Subtopic: What's the Blue Guild's Current Position?]

[Is It Okay for a Large Guild to Continue Their Wickedness Within a Dungeon? - Kim Sung-Kyeong, Dungeon Columnist]

[A Large Guild's Abuse of Power Behind the Scenes, How Should We Look At Jung Yoo-Ra's Situation? - Report Kang Yoo-Mi, Lindel Political Desk]

[Miss Jung's (29) Controversial Past Re-ignited]

[Rumors About Giving it to the Mercenary Queen, Was She Aiming for the Blue Guild or the Red Mercenary Guild? Black Swan's Incomprehensible Move.]

I couldn't help but be shocked because it felt like the world had changed in one day.

My hands started shaking and I couldn't figure out what was going on. Of course, that bastard's sly face popped into my head once again. I started to hear voices from all over the place.

“Ohh, I think I’ve entered a dungeon with her before… I’m sure all of these are true. It’s because of the Blue Guild that these articles are being written. If it were us, I’m sure we would’ve ended up in the grave,” someone said.

“That bitch. It’s because of people like her that Lindel isn’t progressing,” another said.

“Be quiet. Someone might…”

“Am I wrong?”

“Still…”

“Hey… isn’t that Jung Yoo-Ra?” someone asked.

“Shh, she can hear you.”

‘That… that bastard.’

I finally realized it. I wasn’t the only one that wasn’t done with this yet.

‘That bastard… ’

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1. The pov switches to Jung Yoo-Ra ☜

CHAPTER 70
THE PRESS (3)

"It's a good article."

I imagined there would be a change, but I never expected them to do this much and focus on the rights of the large guilds which has been a problem in Lindel for a long time now. In addition to attacking Jung Yoo-Ra, they also criticized the overall atmosphere of society.

[The Wickedness of Large Guilds Within Dungeons. Is This Really Okay?]

'Very good.'

The title really pulled on my heartstrings and I was sure that I wasn't the only one that had all sorts of thoughts. The people reading the article should have experienced the same thing I had once or twice. It didn't just apply to situations that happened inside a dungeon. I was sure that most people had been bossed around once or twice on the hunting ground, a weapon shop, or even while they were walking. Of course, since my social status in Lindel was considerable, I never experienced something like that. But I was sure that the adventurers from small guilds had always been suffering for some reason.

Being affiliated with a large guild within Lindel meant you were in the upper class of society and if I were to exaggerate a bit, it was no different from being in the director position of a large company on Earth. You would have the position to act on your own and if anything, you would only get more benefits. As such, there would be corruption happening within the city that I wasn't aware of. There could even be things happening beyond my imagination.

Even though the image of the Red Mercenary Guild and the Blue Guild weren't all that bad, that wasn't the case for the Black Swan Guild. As the victim, the public projected me onto themselves, empathized, and became angry together. Large guilds that were quick to catch on started keeping their distance from the Black Swan Guild to show that they were different from them. Even the small clans and mid-sized guilds who were taking advantage of the situation started to express their opinions

cautiously. It looked like a different type of social movement and being able to move the public meant power. No matter how powerful a person was, it didn't mean anything if they had no supporters.

Thanks to the middle class being the cog in the wheel, people like me who were in the upper class were able to keep living their lives. They purchased the potions that I made and asked for information about the dungeon. They were the class that utilized the weapon shop that the Red Mercenary Guild managed, paid money to listen to lectures about magic from the Devil's Guild, purchased cheap information that the Black Swan Guild was selling, and disposed of consumable items and materials that were sold by other large guilds. The upper class wouldn't be able to maintain their status without the middle class because no matter how powerful we were, we would only able to maintain our status because the people below us were supporting us.

I was sure that they forgot that this wasn't Earth and that they were in a place that could be moved by power. I was certain that this was the reason why the other large guilds didn't bother reaching out to the press. No, it could also be that they didn't like the press very much.

A tool known as the press…

'It's a tool that can change the public's opinion.'

They must have abandoned it to be certain of their vested rights, but if someone appeared to have acquired them, the situation would change.

Everyone must have realized it by now.

'Just how scary it is when the public turns their backs on you.'

It was really effective. Not only was the public boycotting all the businesses that were managed by the Black Swan Guild, but the medium and small-sized guilds, famous expeditioners, and adventurers all expressed that they weren't going to capture a dungeon with the Black Swan Guild.

'Some of them… '

Were even doing it in order to kiss up to Cha Hee-Ra of the Red Mercenary Guild.

'Some of them… '

Were taking advantage of the situation.

'And others… '

Were doing it in order to help those who were being oppressed and marginalized. Even though everyone had their own reasons, they all stood up. I believe that if a historian in the far future evaluated what had happened today, they would have a lot to say since the small pebble that I threw started to create ripples that could lead to a cultural revolution.

When I stepped outside after finishing my meal, I saw reporters rushing in. Of course, the reporters that I saw weren't the same reporters that worked with me. These people knew that there was an opportunity to make some money and they stormed in. As expected, they cautiously asked me questions.

"I'd like to ask you a question. Regarding Miss Jung Yoo-Ra…"

"I'm sorry, no official announcement has been made…" I said.

"You may feel uncomfortable about this, but is there anything you would like to say to Miss Jung Yoo-Ra?" another reporter asked.

"I'll hold an official press conference at a later date," I said.

"Miss Jung Yoo-Ra stated that the Red Mercenary Guild and the Blue Guild have colluded to attack the Black Swan Guild. What do you think about that?" another asked.

"It's not something I can answer right now," I told them.

"Hey, stop getting so close to him!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

"It's fine, Deok-Gu," I told him.

I had to be nice to the press because the press and those in power were forever friends.

"I would like to ask your opinion on the boycott that's currently happening against the Black Swan Guild."

The person that asked the question looked familiar.

'I think her name's Kim Sung-Kyeong.'

Surely, that must be her name. It wouldn't be a bad idea to answer this question.

"Regardless of whether it's true or not, I can feel just how lost the people are. I'm the same as them. But I'm sure that the pus of injustice that many people have been enduring all this time has been drained. I can understand the public's actions, but I'm worried that I have incurred the anger of many people as a result of this. That's all," I explained.

This was probably the best answer.

"Based on what you said just now, are you saying that you *did* get threatened while you were in the dungeon?" a reporter asked.

"No comment," I answered.

"Are you supporting the boycott?" another reporter asked.

"A part of me does support it, but the other part of me doesn't. I'm just worried that this might cause additional damage," I said.

Giving an ambiguous answer at a time like this was useful.

I wasn't trying to become enemies with the Black Swan Guild. I just wanted to create an opportunity so that I can have a peaceful conversation with the Black Swan Guild. All I wanted was Jung Yoo-Ra.

"Could you please say something about Miss Cha Hee-Ra?" a reporter asked.

"I'll be sure to make arrangements for that later," I said.

"Please say a word to the adventurers who are currently angry about this situation."

"I'm really at a loss, but I'll say one thing. Your actions against injustice in society are never wrong and you're more influential than you think you are. Don't give in to external oppression. Act because all of you are valuable," I said.

I noticed that the reporters were writing down my answer and I could already foresee the title that was going to be published in tomorrow's newspaper.

[I Fully Understand the Adventurers That are Feeling Lost.]

Or…

[I Support the Boycott but Worried About Additional Damage.]

I was thinking about these types of articles, but they might write something that was more provocative than what I was thinking since they were professionals.

I felt better. While I was passing by the reporters, they started asking me different questions, but I knew I shouldn't cross the line. As the person that was pretending to be the victim, I shouldn't say so much because the more the public read along the lines, the more advantageous it would be for me.

While I was thinking about different things, I heard Park Deok-Gu's voice next to me.

"I didn't think it was going to blow up like this, hyung-nim."

"Same here," I replied.

"I feel like we should be careful on how we act from now on… or something like that,"

"I'm sure it wouldn't matter if you just act like yourself," I told him.

"Now that I think about it, didn't the Red Mercenary Guild say that they were going to announce their stance?" he asked.

"Yeah, they did."

The Red Mercenary Guild was probably going to express how much they pitied the Black Swan Guild. I was sure that they weren't going to try to reverse the criticism that the Black Swan Guild was receiving, but it was natural for them to address the criticism that Jung Yoo-Ra was receiving and the things she said about Cha Hee-Ra,

the Mercenary Queen.

'And probably within a week… '

The Black Swan should announce their stance about this in a week, but honestly, it was already late. I wasn't sure what they were discussing internally, but they must have been shocked by the unexpected situation. They must have been frustrated by the fact that they had to make an announcement to the public when all they knew how to do was fight. There must be internal strife going on within their ranks right now.

If I were in the same situation as them, I would have formed a response team and tried to contact this opposing guild no matter what. Just simply trying to contact the other guild was more than enough to show that they were trying to fix the situation. If there were competent people within the Black Swan Guild, They wouldn't have let the situation go this far.

That was when Sun Hee-Young approached me and spoke. "Mr. Ki-Young?"

"Yes?" I asked.

"The Black Swan Guild is looking for you," she said.

'I knew it.'

It wouldn't make sense if they didn't do anything, so I guess that they weren't complete idiots.

"Do you know who came?" I asked.

"I'm not exactly sure. They looked like they came to apologize," she answered.

"Are they waiting in the living room?" I asked.

Sun Hee-Young nodded lightly. "Yes."

After quietly thanking her, I immediately entered the guild's living room and saw familiar faces. Honestly, the first person I recognized was Jung Yoo-Ra. Afterward, I saw the senior officials of the Black Swan Guild. I saw that they were having a friendly conversation with the out of probation, Lee Seol-Ho, along with the other

senior officers of the Blue Guild. I guess they came to not only get in contact with me but with the guild as well.

'Crazy gramps.'

I wasn't sure if they were trying to take this opportunity to take credit for my work, but I didn't like how they were trying to get involved.

"I'm not sure where to start…"

"Hahaha, it's nothing. First of all…"

I was filled with annoyance.

Just then, I noticed a woman sitting on one side of the room.

'Lee Ji-Hye?'

In the tutorial dungeon, she was the woman that managed the shelter that Kim Hyun-Sung made. She and I had a somewhat strategic partnership.

She wasn't incompetent, so I knew she would do well no matter where she went, but I never imagined that she would join the Black Swan Guild. She seemed pretty experienced with talking quietly to the gramps of our guild.

'Sigh.'

[Checking Player Lee Ji-Hye's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Lee Ji-Hye]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 29]

[Nature - Selfish and ambitious person]

[Job - Leader]

[Stats]

[Strength - 09/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 15/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 29/Above rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 10/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 15/Below average growth limit]

[Magic - 05/Below average growth limit]

[Overall Review - Congratulations, Player Lee Ki-Young. You met with your soulmate again. At this point, I guess it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it's fate. There may have been a time when you two were together, but I wouldn't recommend getting back together again. I'll say this again, but I'll feel really bad for your baby. Please be careful of your actions.]

She was smiling toward the gramps and was trying to make a good first impression. At the same time, it was natural for her to focus on me. When Lee Ji-Hye saw me, she spoke as if she was happy to see me.

"Oppa! It's been a while."

'Oppa my ass!'

CHAPTER 71
THE PRESS (4)

Based on the mood, I had an idea of what was going on.

'Smart.'

I wasn't the only one that was taking advantage of the situation. The Black Swan Guild also needed someone who was able to keep up with the situation and I was sure that they tried to find someone among them that could resolve this situation. It was a bit surprising that the person they chose was Lee Ji-Hye, but I somewhat understood why. She was well-versed in politics and from all the people that I met so far, she was the quickest to catch on to things. Lee Ji-Hye was 100 times better than Jung Yoo-Ra who didn't know her place.

There was a good chance that her greeting me like this was part of her calculations.

'So you want to show it off, huh?'

She must have greeted me to show the members of the Black Swan Guild that we were close. It wouldn't matter if I pretended not to know her, but if I played along, then we would certainly get something in return. Lee Ji-Hye was a woman that knew exactly what making a deal meant.

"Are you really Ji-Hye?" I asked.

"Yes. I didn't think I'd meet you here. Hehe," she said.

"It's been a while. Have you been doing well?" I asked.

"Yes, of course. I thought it would be hard for us to see each other again, so I'm glad we met like this," she said.

"It's good to see you again. Really," I told her.

Seeing her nod and smile made me think that my assumption was correct. The

middle-aged woman from the Black Swan Guild looked happy, and as expected, the gramps from our guild looked really pleased as well.

“Hahaha. What a small world.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

‘Why are you laughing? You crazy old man.’

I didn’t like the fact that the old gramps were sitting here from the start. I became flustered and was at a loss for words because they looked submissive and even tried to read the room. Even if the Black Swan Guild was a large guild that represented Lindel, there was no reason for the Blue Guild to bow in this current situation. The Blue Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild also had a close relationship and the situation itself gave us an advantage.

Simply ruining Jung Yoo-Ra wasn’t the only thing we could gain from it. In the process of resolving this complicated diplomatic case, the Blue Guild had more to gain as a guild than me, but they must have not realized that. I thought that maybe they were personally acquainted with each other and it became obvious that they were close just by looking at them.

“I’m really sorry for not visiting earlier. We also had a few issues we needed to handle ourselves,” the woman said.

“It’s fine. You coming here yourself is more than enough,” the old man replied.

‘More than enough? Bullshit. You crazy old man.’

The way they were putting on a show was a sight to see. Those two were apologizing to each other while the people that were directly involved in the case stayed quiet. The woman tried to greet me when she saw me standing quietly, but there wasn’t anything about this situation that I liked. Honestly, it was to the point that I felt like they were being rude.

When I quietly looked at the middle-aged woman, I guess that she must have realized something because I saw her introducing herself. “Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Choi Eun-Hee from the Black Swan Guild.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Lee Ki-Young.”

But it seemed like the crazy gramps weren't planning on helping me out. I noticed them immediately stopping me from saying anymore and started talking to the woman again.

"How about some tea, Miss Choi Eun-Hee?" one of the old men asked.

"Sounds good, Mr. Seol-Ho," she answered.

The old man glanced over at me and then continued his conversation with Choi Eun-Hee. When I saw him trying to ruin my entire scheme, I was furious.

'Should I break this up?'

It was a situation where the trash members of the guild were being a lot more annoying than the enemy. I knew that they were going to do something annoying someday, but I never imagined that they would ruin my plan like this.

It happened when I was thinking about whether it would be a good idea to say something.

"I think it'll be best if you two drank the tea since we still have issues that need to be taken care of." Lee Ji-Hye quietly told them.

"Oh."

Lee Seol-Ho looked a bit flustered and the way Choi Eun-Hee was looking at Lee Ji-Hye was the same as Lee Seol-Ho. But when I saw Choi Eun-Hee nod with a bitter expression made me realize that Lee Ji-Hye had a lot of authority in this situation.

'So that's how it is.'

It wasn't sure what she told the senior officers of the Black Swan Guild, but it seemed like they had a lot of faith in her, which wasn't a bad thing for me.

"Then, shall we do that, Mr. Seol-Ho?" Choi Eun-Hee asked.

"Excuse me?" he asked.

"There's something we need to discuss as well. I think it'll be best to let the kids take care of the current situation. I'll first show you the gift that I brought over with me,"

she answered.

“Hahaha, thank you very much, Miss Choi Eun-Hee,” Lee Seol-Ho was grateful.

‘Crazy bastard.’

Choi Eun-Hee seemed a bit better than our Lee Seol-Ho since she seemed like she was at least trying to read the room.

After glancing at me, Choi Eun-Hee stood up and spoke to Lee Ji-Hye. “I’ll leave it up to you, child.”

“Okay, unnie,” Lee Ji-Hye replied.

No matter how you looked at it, she didn’t look like an unnie. Lee Ji-Hye probably said that to make her feel good.

Soon after, I saw Lee Seol-Ho, Choi Eun-Hee, and the other senior members leaving the living room. After the door closed, the only people that were left in the room were me, Lee Ji-Hye, and Jung Yoo-Ra. Lee Ji-Hye wore a bright smile, but Jung Yoo-Ra didn’t look so good. She must have been through a lot of stress considering how she looked.

Jung Yoo-Ra was the main culprit behind all this and I was sure that she never thought it would get this big. Many adventurers were boycotting the Black Swan Guild and to make things worse, it became difficult for them to join a normal party. She was basically the most hated person in Lindel right now and it was only natural for her to lose her position as well. Right now, she might be in a situation where she should be thankful for the fact that she was still a member of the guild.

‘I don’t understand why she acted all high and mighty.’

It was natural for them to see me smiling since we were the only ones here and Lee Ji-Hye preferred this kind of atmosphere more than an awkward one anyway. As expected, she leaned against the back of the sofa and spoke. “Isn’t it annoying?”

“What is?”

“That old geezer. He’s obviously useless… if I were you, I would have ripped his head off,” she answered.

“Well, you’re not wrong but… we have our reasons as well. Plus, I never imagined you would be here,” I told her.

“It just somehow happened that way. I did originally get an offer from the Black Swan Guild, but I was in a situation where I was getting further from the fast track, but who knew the world would change like this? Our guild needed someone that could fix the situation. I’m a bit embarrassed to say this about myself, but I think I’m pretty quick-witted. I think the higher-ups thought that I was the perfect person to handle the situation,” she explained.

“I had a feeling,” I said.

“It’s all thanks to you, oppa. As I mentioned before, a woman needs to meet a competent man,” she said.

“I appreciate that,” I replied.

“They’re not empty words. They treated me very well because of the fact that I’m close to Lee Ki-Young and I also knew that you planned this situation out,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

I couldn’t understand the key point of what she was saying, but I wasn’t dumb enough to openly say that I was the one behind this. I spoke as the corner of my lips slightly went up. “Well, I’m not sure what you mean.”

Next to me, Jung Yoo-Ra looked really flustered because it seemed like she found this situation ridiculous since we were talking while completely ignoring her.

I also couldn’t help but be a bit surprised of this situation. I did think that Lee Ji-Hye had settled down somewhere, but I didn’t think that she would completely exclude Jung Yoo-Ra since she was an individual that the Black Swan Guild once supported. Actually, Jung Yoo-Ra seemed to be walking on thin ice around Lee Ji-Hye.

‘Wow.’

I couldn’t help but acknowledge the fact that Lee Ji-Hye was a capable woman, no, it was more than that. Even if she told the guild that she had a connection with me, the way she took advantage of the situation was great.

“I already told them how you were going to act because honestly, it doesn’t really

matter what the truth is… what's important right now is how we're going to fix the issue. Hm… before we start talking about it… shall we play?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

Of course, but…

"I'm not interested," I answered.

I wasn't going to accept it.

"Oh my, how cold. I thought it would be good to reminisce about the past for a moment…" she muttered.

"Stop talking nonsense and make an offer, noona. We both know what we're thinking, so let's not change the subject," I suggested.

"You're really cold. If you're worried about that woman next to you, you don't have to worry, oppa," she said.

"It's not because of her," I answered.

"I think I know the reason… well, before we start talking about it, I believe an apology is in order. Oh! It's your turn now, Miss Yoo-Ra," she said.

I saw Lee Ji-Hye lightly patting Jung Yoo-Ra's shoulder and to be honest, it was a sight I never imagined I would see. It was to the point that I regretted just a little bit of the fact that I didn't bring Lee Ji-Hye to our side. She was a lot more capable than I thought.

When Lee Ji-Hye called for her, Jung Yoo-Ra started glancing at me. She obviously didn't want to apologize to me because she thought that she didn't do anything wrong. In addition, Lee Ji-Hye's attitude and mine must have convinced her not to apologize even more. She struggled to say each word. I couldn't help but laugh after seeing her act like a typical loser. This may not be the direction I wanted to take, but it wasn't that bad.

"…I'm sorry," Jung Yoo-Ra said.

"Oh my, Miss Yoo-Ra. You should apologize more genuinely. It'll only disappoint my oppa," Lee Ji-Hye told her.

“I’m… I’m… sorry,” she stuttered.

“…”

But as always, she didn’t seem genuine and that was when Lee Ji-Hye grabbed Jung Yoo-Ra’s hair.

‘Gasp.’

When I heard a *slap*, Jung Yoo-Ra’s head turned as well. I wasn’t really sure what was going on.

I kind of expected this after seeing Jung Yoo-Ra walk on thin ice around Lee Ji-Hye, but I didn’t think that she would fall this much.

“Miss Yoo-Ra, do you think I was joking?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

I guess she wasn’t satisfied because Lee Ji-Hye slapped her once more and Jung Yoo-Ra’s head turned once again.

“Please apologize properly.”

Honestly, it was a funny situation. Just by looking at Lee Ji-Hye’s attitude, it was obvious just how badly Jung Yoo-Ra had fallen and honestly, Lee Ji-Hye’s actions right now were a bit more exciting than seeing how far Jung Yoo-Ra fell. I was sure that there were a lot of calculations involved for her to be able to act this way. But this was a type of confirmation on her authority over her and I noticed that Lee Ji-Hye was trying to butter me up. For someone without combat capabilities, it was amazing that she was able to act like that.

Jung Yoo-Ra could easily kill Lee Ji-Hye. But from Jung Yoo-Ra’s attitude, it was obvious that she couldn’t possibly kill Lee Ji-Hye. As such, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that Lee Ji-Hye’s position within the Black Swan Guild was far greater than my position within the Blue Guild.

“Please apologize properly by getting down on your knees,” Lee Ji-Hye advised.

“…”

I heard another loud noise as Jung Yoo-Ra’s head turned again. Of course, I didn’t feel

sorry for her at all. Actually, it was a bit satisfying. I wasn't a pervert, but seeing the person who annoyed me suffer made me feel good.

Tears were rolling down from Jung Yoo-Ra's eyes and she seemed like she was trying to hold them back.

'Nice, my Ji-Hye is doing well.'

The way she grabbed Jung Yoo-Ra's hair and forced her to stand up was a sight to see. I even wanted to applaud.

"I told you to apologize properly, Miss Yoo-Ra," Lee Ji-Hye said.

No matter what Jung Yoo-Ra chose, she was going to be humiliated either way, so in the end, Jung Yoo-Ra started to get down on her knees.

"That's right. It looks like you can finally understand," Lee Ji-Hye praised.

"I'm…"

I saw her lying flat on the ground as if she was prostrating. "I'm sorry. *Sob*… I'm really sorry. I'm sorry… for… acting out of line," Jung Yoo-Ra apologized amidst her stuttering sobs.

I felt a strange catharsis. This woman could kill me with one shot, but seeing her lying pitifully on the ground was oddly pleasing. When Jung Yoo-Ra slightly got up, Lee Ji-Hye glanced at me and immediately spoke up.

"Now that I think about it, I feel like there's something you want…"

"Your shoes do look a bit dirty…"

I noticed a smirk on Lee Ji-Hye's face.

'How unfortunate.'

This was the only thought I had.

CHAPTER 72
AMBITIOUS MAN (1)

“Your shoes do look a bit dirty…” Lee Ji-Hye said.

Jung Yoo-Ra frowned after Lee Ji-Hye said that, but seeing her slowly crawling toward me made me think that she decided to put herself down. Her body was trembling, but I didn’t feel any murderous intent from her.

‘Hm… ’

It seemed like she was more worried about Lee Ji-Hye than me.

I was interested in how Lee Ji-Hye got to her position more than how Jung Yoo-Ra fell. But before I could say anything, I heard a voice. “You seem like you’re curious about a lot of things,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“Of course. I honestly didn’t think that you’d handle this woman this way. At one point, she was the talented member that the Black Swan Guild supported and she was also powerful… you’re not the type that enjoys risks though, Ji-Hye. So are you prepared for what might happen after?” I asked.

“There’s no risk. There is none, so you don’t have to worry, oppa,” she answered.

I was going to ask what she meant but I stopped because I noticed Jung Yoo-Ra’s status window in front of me.

[Checking Player Jung Yoo-Ra’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Yoo-Ra]

[Title - Most Hated Person, Worst Woman Ever]

[Age - 29]

[Nature - Calculative Strategist]

[Job - Assassin Thief - Rare Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic archery knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic dagger knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic entrapment knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic assassination knowledge]

[The acquired knowledge cannot be used.]

[Stats]

[Strength - 41→05/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 55→10/Above epic growth limit]

[Stamina - 43→11/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 40→30/Below rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 20→05/Above rare growth limit]

[Luck - 23→10/Below rare growth limit]

[Magic - 43→09/Above epic growth limit]

[Overall Review - Due to the external shock Jung Yoo-Ra received, her body has been damaged. Not only has the majority of her mana circuits been destroyed, but her stats have decreased due to muscle fiber damage. She may be able to do everyday things, but it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that her life as an adventurer is over. Her wounds may heal through a legendary medicine called the Elixir or through the holy healing magic of a saint-level priest… but who knows. Anyway, I feel really bad for her. Unlike Player Lee Ki-Young who had nothing from the start, people who lose the things they already had would feel a great sense of loss.]

'Wow… '

What caught my attention was her poor physical condition more than her new title. I had a feeling that she was eventually going to get that title, but her overall stat had decreased. Before I could figure out exactly what happened, I heard Lee Ji-Hye's voice.

She quenched my curiosity.

"Her body's been injured all over the place."

"…"

"She may look fine on the outside, but people are saying that they're unsure whether she'll be able to live an ordinary life. Of course, I wouldn't know the details, but if the press weren't so focused on her, she should have been dead long ago. Honestly, I'm no different from her savior and I'm sure you understand that she needs to be alive. There are still people who have no idea what's going on… and that's why the higher-ups of our guild are very angry," Lee Ji-Hye explained.

"I understand."

"The guild tried to help her grow, but she went around creating conflict on a daily basis and from what I heard, this wasn't her first time doing this. Jung Yoo-Ra basically got caught for her actions. I don't know the details, but I guess there were a lot of people who thought that the guild's power was their power. I think they're taking this opportunity to pick those people out… as an example, this woman got caught," she said.

"Hm…"

"I'm sure there's a more political reason, but since it's an internal issue, I can't tell you even if you're my oppa," she added.

"I guess an internal strife really did happen," I surmised.

I was sure of it and as expected, I saw her lightly nod.

I expected it to get messy internally, but I didn't think it was going to get this messy. It could be just my imagination, but I was sure that the members of the Black Swan Guild were getting a headache because of people like Jung Yoo-Ra. I was sure that they were eventually going to reform the guild and there should be members with power that wanted to replace some of the guild's members. Basically, Jung Yoo-Ra became a good reason to start the purge at the perfect time.

"Since the guild was rotting away internally, I'm sure the higher-ups believed that it was time for reform. At least, that's what the current guild master unnie thinks," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"Current?" I asked.

"I'm usually not a blabbermouth, but with oppa standing in front of me, I can't help but share all this information. Well, you're eventually going to find out anyway, so it doesn't matter, but we just haven't made an official announcement yet. Once this situation has been taken care of, the guild master will be replaced and there are going to be a lot of changes internally. The succession of power was handled peacefully, so you don't have to be suspicious about it," Lee Ji-Hye explained.

"Then does that explain why you're here right now? No, you said that the succession of power was handled peacefully, but seeing Jung Yoo-Ra like this makes me think that your words can't be trusted…" I told her.

"Is it really important to know what happened internally? The world doesn't revolve around the truth. What matters is what the public thinks and I think the same thing can be said about the situation you created…" she said.

"I don't understand what you're saying…" I told her.

"You're worried about a lot of things. We don't live in a world where recording magic exists… but anyway, half of what you're thinking is correct, oppa. Even though I'm not the type to take risks, I need to pick a side since my guild master unnie believes that different types of talented people are important," Lee Ji-Hye explained.

"So?" I asked.

"After the incident blew up, all I did was write a few reports and give it to her. I analyzed the current situation, the cause, the reason why the guild was corrupted, the path that the Black Swan Guild should take from now on, the relationship

between the Red Mercenary Guild and the Blue Guild, the Blue Guild's growth potential, and… *hm*… what kind of man Lee Ki-Young is. I don't remember the details because things had been so chaotic," she answered.

"…"

"Anyway, I guess the higher-ups found my actions to be quite refreshing. What would they think if an ordinary guild member visited their office while there were bullshit conversations going on amidst the chaos?" she asked.

They would find that member useful.

The crazy gramps in my guild would react by saying that the idea was bullshit, but if I were a senior member of the Black Swan Guild, then I definitely would have appointed Lee Ji-Hye for the job. Basically, she got the chance to use her abilities as the guild was experiencing an internal crisis.

"Honestly, I don't think the report is perfect. I'm not as smart as you, Ki-Young oppa, and I didn't have enough time. But when a person takes charge of a situation that no one wants to, don't you think they'll be treated well? Well, there was some risk to it, but I think it's okay to take risks once in a while," she said.

"Did something change your mind?" I asked.

"Of course. Well, I'm sure you know the details better than me oppa… let's talk about this later and first discuss the conditions you want. We'll try to tailor our offer to your conditions as much as we can. In addition to what was announced, we can tailor a variety, up to… oh! If you want that woman, you can have her," she explained.

"You're pretty sincere," I told her.

"Of course."

When I quietly looked down, I saw Jung Yoo-Ra hanging around me. She seemed very desperate. I knew the exact reason why she ended up this way.

'I'm sure she wants to recover.'

I was right. Finding a saint-level priest or the Elixir wouldn't be easy. Since there weren't many people that could be called high-priests to begin with, bringing them

here would cost a lot and the same thing applied to the Elixir. Not only did it require ingredients, but there wasn't a single alchemist that could make it. As such, people had to rely on the drops during a dungeon capture. Basically, she wouldn't be able to recover on her own. Since she had to receive support from the guild to have any chance of recovering, she had to look good in their eyes.

When I slightly lifted her hair, I noticed her looking up at me. Compared to my shoes which were now clean, her face was filled with anger, resentment, worry, and regret.

"I didn't think that it would work out so well…" I said.

"…"

Honestly, I couldn't say that I was interested anymore.

"The world's a bit messed up… don't you think?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"Yes…" Jung Yoo-Ra answered.

"After watching you, I realized that no one really knows what's going to happen to them," Lee Ji-Hye added.

"…"

"I'm sure it's difficult to understand, but consider it as paying for what you've done so far. It's basically karma for all the things you've done," she told Jung Yoo-Ra.

"Okay…" Jung Yoo-Ra said.

"You're looking at me as if what I said also applies to me," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"N-No, I didn't…"

"It probably won't happen the way you want it to. What would you know when you've never been at the lowest point in your life? *Pffft.*"

"…"

"In your case, you were just unlucky this time. Yeah, consider it as stepping in shit cause that's basically what you did. If you work hard, you may be able to make a

comeback, so live your life as best as you can. And *hm*… this is for making his shoes clean. I didn't really like you, but… you should still be rewarded for your hard work. That's the beauty of society," Lee Ji-Hye explained.

When I searched my pocket, a frown appeared on Jung Yoo-Ra's face. I took out a bag full of gold and I slowly dropped them to the ground. I noticed Jung Yoo-Ra biting her lips until they bled. Her eyes were filled with tears and I was certain that she was angry. Even now, I must still look like an insect in her eyes.

"You should look happy," Lee Ji-Hye told her.

"That's right, Miss Yoo-Ra. It's a present from oppa, so you should smile," she added.

"Th-Thank you," Jung Yoo-Ra said.

The way she slowly grabbed the gold that was on the ground was a sight that I wanted to see and honestly, the fact that a person was able to fall this easily was actually a bit fun. Her acting that way could be a lesson. Rather than the lesson that I shouldn't live like her, the fact that I could end up like her if I wasn't careful enough was more relatable. I did think that it wasn't what a normal person would think, but I also didn't think that it was wrong to think that way. I had to raise my own value and get rid of my enemies and in that sense, I really liked how this incident ended. I couldn't say that it was completely over yet, but at least my connection with Jung Yoo-Ra would end here.

"It was fun. You can leave now," I said.

I knew that she had no chance for recovery because a large guild wouldn't have any reason to invest in her again. Despite that, the fact that she still wanted to live without losing hope was a part of her that I liked. After all, the more hope she had, the greater the despair.

Thinking that she was going to live with the thought that she was going to recover someday and return to her place caused me to laugh. Jung Yoo-Ra probably thought that there was going to be a light at the end of the tunnel, but I didn't think that she was going to reach the end anytime soon. Even if she did reach the end of that tunnel, it wouldn't happen for a while. Still, she must be going to console herself while imagining her life in 10, or maybe 20 years later.

'Because that's what humans do.'

I had no idea what kind of life she was going to live from now on. She could die once the press quieted down a bit or she could end up living an ordinary life. But if I ever encountered her in the slums, there was only one thing that I would say to her.

'You messed with the wrong person.'

When Jung Yoo-Ra slowly left the living room, Lee Ji-Hye started talking.

"Are you satisfied, oppa?"

"About half… now, it'd be nice if you could tell me what you can do for me," I said.

"Of course. I'm sure you won't be disappointed."

CHAPTER 73
AMBITIOUS MAN (2)

“Oh! Would it be okay if I told you our conditions first?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“Of course,” I answered.

“First, you need to make a public announcement.”

“For example?” I asked.

“About how you accepted Black Swan Guild’s Jung Yoo-Ra’s apology and that you two worked things out and that you were never physically threatened… I’d appreciate it if you could add that as well. Other than that, you can say whatever you want… well, as long as you say something that’ll calm the people down, it doesn’t matter what you say,” she answered.

“Hm… even if I do that, it won’t be easy,” I told her.

“Additionally, I’d like you to mention how the Black Swan Guild is changing,” she added.

“Are you trying to use me as a marketing tool?” I asked.

“Of course! Some people are calling you Lee Ki-Young, the symbol of resistance… after some time passes, I’m sure you’ll earn the title as well. There should be a certain image that you want to portray, so the additional conditions are optional, but… I hope you’ll mention it at least for me. You can say something like, ‘it’s all of you that forced a large guild to change. This is your victory. I’m not the only winner!’ or anything else,” she explained.

“Winner my ass…”

I couldn’t help but laugh at her devious idea. The reason why the Black Swan Guild’s power system was changing was that there were a lot of political relations involved. Of course, I couldn’t deny the fact that this situation was what sparked the change,

but if it weren't for the internal issues that the Black Swan Guild had, then there was a good chance that nothing would have changed. As such, I couldn't help but laugh because, despite that, Lee Ji-Hye asked me to make an announcement that focused on the *victory* that the public earned for themselves.

"The truth doesn't really matter, right? I'm sure you already know that it's important to make the public think that they've won…" Lee Ji-Hye said.

"That's why I'm laughing," I told her.

"Well, we're not just going to sit by and watch, so you don't have to worry about us. As long as you don't pour more oil into the fire with your remarks, we'll be fine. Please be careful about saying things like you understand the public or using the word, wickedness," she said.

"I understand. I'll think about it," I said.

"For old times' sake, okay?"

I noticed her smiling, but I didn't care.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Yes. You may not have the authority for this, but… we're currently promoting a three-power alliance between the Red Mercenary Guild, Black Swan Guild, and the Blue Guild. I'd like it if you could make an official announcement about this as well. This won't put you at a disadvantage anyway, oppa," Lee Ji-Hye requested.

"So you're saying that I'll be able to expand my influence within the guild, right?" I asked.

"Yes, but I won't ask you to announce it right away since the situation's still chaotic. However, I do want you to mention the friendly atmosphere that we have and how you want to maintain a good relationship with the Black Swan Guild since we've changed or something like that," she answered.

"You're asking for a lot of things… you're going to reward me properly for this, right?" I asked her.

"Yes. All the items and materials we received from the Garden of Horror will be

personally given to you, oppa. This also includes any share from the dungeons we have completed along with a few land documents," she answered.

"Considering the public's opinion, the rewards don't sound that great," I told her.

"In the official announcement, we're going to say that we donated them," she said.

"*Ahhh,* now I understand," I said.

"No one will know what you received from our guild, oppa."

I couldn't trust her completely because Lee Ji-Hye was definitely capable of backstabbing me. If the public found out that I somehow received a huge benefit from this incident, then she could use the press to her advantage and I wouldn't be able to avoid the public's criticism about it.

"Even if the public did find out, I believe you're more than capable of fixing it," Lee Ji-Hye said.

'She's right.'

Many media outlets were already on my side and even if something like that did happen, fixing it shouldn't be a big problem. The majority of the media outlets in Lindel had already decided to side with the Blue Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild, so it was only natural for the Black Swan Guild to want to work with us, but that was only if Lee Ji-Hye and the members of the Black Swan Guild knew about it.

"The guild will also provide support to Kim Hyun-Sung's party," she said.

"Isn't that too generous?" I asked.

"That's because we want to look good in front of you, oppa," she answered.

"I'm not happy with this kind of attention…" I told her.

Even though she didn't say it, I was certain that she exaggerated her description of me to her guild members. My value had to go up so that Lee Ji-Hye's position could go up since we had a connection. It was basically a win-win relationship. I didn't feel good about it, though, but I didn't feel bad either. Just by looking at the results, I had a lot to gain from this.

“If there’s anything else you want, we’ll try our best to…”

“I’ll leave that up to you. I’m sure your guild has an idea about how much they want to give me, so it doesn’t matter what they give me for now,” I said, cutting her off.

“That’s a bit burdensome. It sounds as if you’re going to test us,” she said.

“Not at all. To be honest, I don’t understand why you guys are offering me this much. I’m not saying that the Black Swan Guild is doing this for attention, but it’s a bit too much. I’m sure that I’m not the only person that you need to take care of. You also need to take care of the Red Mercenary Guild as well, so all I’m saying is that this doesn’t seem like a profitable endeavor,” I explained.

“I’m a bit embarrassed to say this, but I did slightly influence their decision,” she confessed.

“That’s why I’m more curious about it. You’re too rational to say that you’re tied down by the past, noona. I’d appreciate it if you could tell me what you really want,” I said.

There was silence. Lee Ji-Hye’s expression didn’t change and she didn’t seem shocked either. She remained calm as she continued to talk and to be honest, her answer was far from what I expected.

“Didn’t I tell you last time?” she asked.

“About what?” I asked.

“That ambitious men were my type,” she answered.

“Stop joking arou…”

The moment I saw her eyes, I couldn’t finish my sentence because the way she looked straight at me told me that she wasn’t lying. I couldn’t see the smile she always had on her face.

“Do you think I’m joking?” she asked.

“…”

“I’ll tell you a funny story,” she said.

I quietly nodded because I felt like that was what I should do.

“Have you ever heard of the former U.S. President Clinton’s couple story? Even though it’s fictional, it’s still interesting…” she said.

“No,” I answered.

After breathing out, she started to explain. Even though it was a random story, it was interesting.

“During Bill Clinton’s presidency, he and Hilary Clinton visited a gas station to get gas and supposedly, Hilary Clinton gave an unfamiliar man a big hug.”

“That’s interesting,” I commented.

“He later found out that the man at the gas station was Hilary’s ex-boyfriend… the couple talked about the man on their way back and Bill Clinton made a slightly mean comment. He said… if you were still dating that man, I’m sure you would be working at the gas station with him,” she said.

“…”

“What kind of answer do you think Hilary gave him?” she asked.

“…”

“No, I’m sure he would have become the president of the United States, not you,” Lee Ji-Hye answered.

It was definitely an interesting story. If I were to substitute Bill and Hilary Clinton with me and Lee Ji-Hye, then it was no different from her telling me that she would make me the president.

“It’s a relatable story, but personally, I want to add one more pre-requisite to the story,” she said.

“And that’s?”

“How ambitious a man is,” she answered.

‘Wow… ’

“People say that men are animals that change depending on how the woman acts, but a man who acts with no ambition isn't attractive at all,” she explained.

“You do understand the situation that I’m in, right?” I asked.

“Of course. You’re the Mercenary Queen’s lover… not only that, but you have a ticking bomb named Jung Ha-Yan that you’re raising by your side. But a woman’s charm is based on either their looks or power,” she said.

“Huh…”

“I’m not desperately clinging onto you and asking you to go out with me, oppa because I already know that those types of women aren’t popular. I don’t care how much you bite, suck and roll around with the mercenary that’s crazy for blood or with that weird and crazy mage. If that’s the course I need to take in order to climb the ranks, then I’ll welcome it because I already know that women like me will be chosen in the end,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“…”

“A woman that can turn men like you into kings.”

‘Pffft… ’

I was so shocked that I couldn’t speak properly. I understood her character since I saw her selfish and ambitious nature in the tutorial. But I didn’t think that she was this ambitious and selfish. I wasn’t surprised by the fact that she told me she liked me. It was all because of her strange confidence. After all, Lee Ji-Hye’s stats and talents weren’t that good. Of course, she didn’t know about her growth limit, but I was sure that she had an idea about it. The fact that she chose Leader as her job was proof that she knew about her limits and despite that, this woman that resembled me remained confident. Not including the stats and the force that had to be used in that endeavor, she was still confident that she could turn the man she chose the king.

‘What… ’

Of course, I didn't know when she started having these kinds of thoughts but considering her nature, there was a good chance that she thought about it from the start.

I had no idea how I should react to what she said. As I was simmering in my thoughts, I saw that Lee Ji-Hye was quietly standing up. She started touching my face cautiously.

"Why me?" I asked.

"Who knows? But If I had to come up with a reason…"

"…"

"Because you told me back then that you hoped to see me again?" she answered.

I didn't bother avoiding her light kisses because I had more than enough reason to use her.

"This is the end of our conversation. Don't just think about the conditions that the guild made, but also the things I personally told you about, oppa," she said.

"I'll think about it, noona," I answered.

'Everything that I heard was good.'

She slightly frowned, but after seeing the smile on her face, I guess she was satisfied with the conversation we had. Just when she was about to open the door…

'Oh.'

I noticed Jung Ha-Yan waiting for me outside the living room. Unlike me who was kind of surprised, Lee Ji-Hye didn't look surprised at all. She spoke while looking at Jung Ha-Yan. "It's been a while, Miss Ha-Yan."

"Yes… it's… been… a while, Miss Ji-Hye," Jung Ha-Yan said.

'Shit.'

"I heard you're dating Ki-Young oppa. Are Mr. Hyun-Sung and Mr. Deok-Gu doing well

too?" she asked.

"Yes…" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

"Oh my, congratulations! Seeing you two in love makes me happy. I think we'll be seeing each other often… so I look forward to working with you," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"Me too…"

"Goodbye."

I wasn't sure if I was seeing things, but Jung Ha-Yan's condition seemed very different. I was certain that she had no idea what Lee Ji-Hye and I were talking about in the living room because they used a spell on the room so that others wouldn't be able to disturb them. But I guess Jung Ha-Yan must have discovered the strange air because I noticed her looking at Lee Ji-Hye the same way she looked at Park Hye-Young.

I was certain of it. Jung Ha-Yan had gone mad.

'Shit.'

To make things worse, she was staring at me as if she was interrogating me.

Lee Ji-Hye raised the corner of her lips and smiled at me.

The world was big and there were a lot of women.

However…

I couldn't understand why I kept getting entangled with all these crazy women.

CHAPTER 74
RECOLLECTION OF THE PAST

In the past, no, in the future that hasn’t happened yet, I [1] didn't know exactly how the war started. It was only natural because during that time, I was far from the center of the continent and it wasn’t like I expected it at all. There was an issue concerning the tutorial and there was also an ideological issue. In this situation, the result was more important than the cause.

The conflict started off as a small battle and as it grew into a large fire, it devoured the entire continent. A few groups loathed each other for no reason and even after some time passed, they still screamed their ideologies. Rather than defending one’s own beliefs, they focused on expressing their hate toward each other. Malice begets malice, anger begets anger and revenge begets revenge.

I thought that the war was going to end someday, but it didn’t. A war between the earthlings and the natives. A war between the natives and a war between the earthlings. As they changed the target they loathed and the hate increased, they focused more on the war and treated each other like slaves, and even conducted massacres.

It wasn’t difficult to find horrendous sights everywhere and everyone tacitly agreed to pretend not to notice. Not only did everyone’s distrust toward each other grew, but they also couldn’t even band together in the fight that was going to happen later.

During that time, the archmage that everyone was envious of hung himself after he left an unknown message. A Japanese shaman was murdered and I wasn’t sure if the Mercenary Queen was still alive. The people that I called family and the clan members all died and the many players that were called heroes either died or were ruined. Even the chosen warrior of the holy sword lost their light.

After some time, the alliance shattered. The first act of this meaningless war ended with many casualties.

The boomerang that was thrown far away basically came back to me.

All of mankind was at fault.

“Battles and wars are different.”

“What…”

“I acknowledge the fact that you’re strong and I can’t win against you. It’s not only me, but the people under me won’t be able to win against you. No matter how many times I think about it, it’s a fact I can’t deny. That’s right, I can’t deny it at all.”

“You’re… human…”

“Yes, I’m human. I thought you wouldn’t notice because of my mask… I guess a genius swordsman that’s praised by everyone carries a different atmosphere. I heard you were being protected by magic, but I guess it wasn’t that effective.”

“It’s just a feeling. You obviously look different from the others.”

“I can’t tell whether you’re complimenting or insulting me.”

“What’s your reason for siding with them?”

“I was just betting on the side that had a higher chance of winning. It’s a very obvious and reasonable decision.”

“Many humans died.”

“I already knew that. But the humans had always been killing each other. No matter how many people die, it won’t be as many as in the past. Actually, the higher-ups want to maintain the human population in a very peaceful and standardized location. It’ll be more helpful.”

“Betraying the human race…”

“You’re talking nonsense. I’m not the only one that betrayed them and you should know that.”

“Don’t you feel any remorse?”

“Well, it’s not that I don’t feel any remorse. My heart broke a little when I killed a

civilian and when I had to betray a cute mage that loved me. Love through a fateful encounter. Thinking about that innocent woman always makes me laugh. *Pffft.* I never thought that she would take her own life. Why did she do that? I wanted to use her a bit more. I guess she couldn't overcome the guilt."

"You…"

"It also broke my heart to watch the queen of an empire kill the subjects that she loved, but I had to do it. It was necessary. Seeing a warrior watch their loved ones die also broke my heart. I'm sure the warrior thinks that they've been betrayed by all of you. *Pffft.* That's why you should've done your job properly; we could have avoided these misunderstandings."

"Who… are you? Who the hell are you?!"

"There's no need for you to know. Actually, there's something stranger than that. I never thought you'd react so passionately. I guess it's different when a loved one dies and when a stranger dies."

"…"

"Kim Hyun-Sung, you can't consider yourself as a good person."

"You…"

"You're a hypocrite trash."

"I asked you who…"

"I told you that you don't need to know and even if I told you, you won't even remember who I am. What's more important right now is the action you need to take in order to survive."

"Killing you…"

"Don't act all noble, you piece of trash! You don't have a choice. Of course, I know it'll be a little hard. But how about we do this, Kim Hyun-Sung? Since I'm not a bad guy, I'll give you an opportunity so that you won't feel so guilty. Kill the bastard that's panting next to you. If you don't, your lover dies. Oh, I guess she can't be considered your lover. How should I describe you two? You two did do it, right?"

“You bastard…”

“I’ll tell you again but you don’t have a choice. If you refuse, I’ll hand this bitch over to a group of perverted bastards and she’ll have a great time all day. I suggest you hurry up and make a choice before I run out of patience… Of course, I’ll keep my promise. Unlike someone else, I’m very good at keeping promises…”

“…”

“Hahaha!”

“…”

“I told you that he would do it, noona. *Ohhh,* of course, I’m going to keep my promise. I’m going to let him live and also let the woman go. It’s a bit of a waste to kill him here. He can’t die here. I’ll make sure to put in a good word when I speak to the higher-ups. Oh, I’ll return soon. Don’t worry, my love.”

“…”

“…”

“Good job, Kim Hyun-Sung. I’m not sure how I should say goodbye… Hm, I know. See you next time.”

Crunch!

“Oh.”

Kim Hyun-Sung opened his eyes and his back was covered in cold sweat. He only felt disgusted at the wetness for a moment because when he looked up, he saw the ceiling he had always stared at.

‘I’ve returned. Did I return?’

It was a question he asked himself several times throughout the day.

He was certain that he returned. This was definitely the Blue Guild’s house, not the

place he was staying at before coming here.

There was a sword hanging on one side of the room and there was a sword sitting on top of his bed. This simple room with barely any furniture was definitely his room.

He always smelled like blood, but that smell was no longer there. Instead of hearing screams and people yelling to save them, he heard the sounds of birds chirping in the morning. Instead of feeling a dark and ominous magic, he felt a bright light shining down.

It had been a while since Kim Hyun-Sung dreamed of those times and it had been even a longer time since he had a dream that felt so real. It was to the point that he could still vividly remember the horrible feeling of stabbing his comrade, the conversation he had, and the atmosphere that place gave off. He naturally felt disgusted to the point that he didn't realize that his body had become tense. His breathing became more rapid and he started to feel dizzy. He was about to throw up while his head was filled with different thoughts. When he started to recall his past memories one by one, he couldn't endure it anymore and threw up on the ground.

"*Huff… huff…*"

Kim Hyun-Sung hugged himself with trembling arms.

'It's different now.'

Obviously, things were different now. There weren't any accidents in the tutorial and he managed to save a lot of people.

'It's different now.'

He fixed a lot of issues that happened before and corrected all the mistakes he made so far. There wasn't a single thing that bothered him.

"It's different. It's different from before. I'm sure of it…"

He was able to find Jung Ha-Yan from the start and Kim Ye-Ri started going to dungeons with him. Being able to kill Jung Jin-Ho in the tutorial dungeon was a really great achievement and even though he still had a lot of people to find and things to do, he had no choice but to think that at least, the foundation had been laid.

Kim Hyun-Sung could consider this the start, but he was starting off with a really good advantage. This was a good way to describe it. Compared to before, this round was unimaginably different and he couldn't explain it by simply saying that the situation had improved. Basically, the world changed and it was obvious who was in the center. A talented player he didn't see during the first round.

'Lee Ki-Young.'

There were talented players that didn't exist during the first round. It applied to Park Deok-Gu and it applied to Lee Ki-Young even more because not only did he play the frontman, but he was in charge of the entire party. It was true that Kim Hyun-Sung didn't really expect much from Lee Ki-Young as a mage or an alchemist, but that wasn't his only true value.

'A competent person.'

Lee Ki-Young was too talented to be simply called a competent person. Even while watching him from the side, it felt like the former was using magic. He made sure that we joined the Blue Guild under good conditions, got close to the Mercenary Queen, and even succeeded in recruiting Sun Hee-Young, another talented person who wasn't there in his past life. It was to the point that it felt like Lee Ki-Young had contributed more to the party than he did.

Not only that, but the Black Swan Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild didn't get along before, but they were now in an alliance, which was something Kim Hyun-Sung couldn't imagine during the first round.

'The future changed.'

It changed in a very positive direction.

When the war continued, it either killed a lot of talented people or changed them. From the beginning, non-combatants got involved in the fight between those in power against their will. Of course, it was natural to think that the foundation had to be laid from the beginning for these people so that they could grow.

As such, Kim Hyun-Sung thought that there had to be a positive change, but the situation became a little bit better than he thought.

The butterfly effect. A small flap could create a typhoon. Seeing that happen with his

own eyes made him feel dumbfounded.

The small connection he made in an unexpected place was currently changing Lindel and it was in a positive direction. Of course, it wasn't good to make big changes to the future that was coming, but their situation right now wasn't so bad.

'We need to have reserves.'

'Now was the time to develop our powers to the fullest.'

While Kim Hyun-Sung was having different thoughts, he heard a voice outside his room.

"Hey, bro," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Yes, Mr. Deok-Gu?" he replied.

"It's time for breakfast. Hyung-nim, noonim, the kid, and the lady priest are all waiting," he explained.

"Okay, I'll be right out. I'm sorry. I overslept…" Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"You usually wake up early every day. Were you not able to get any sleep last night?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Something like that," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

"Did you have a lewd dream or something?"

"…"

"Hey, it's a joke. Everyone is waiting so hurry up," he said.

"Okay, thank you for letting me know,"

It could change. One part of his heart was filled with an indescribably anxiety, but he was sure that things could change. The second round started in order to do that and it was a decision he made so that he wouldn't have any regrets. It was his way of atoning for everyone.

'Things can change.'

He was going to change the future; that was the reason why he came here.

"I'm sorry for being late," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"It's fine, Mr. Hyun-Sung," they replied.

"Now, I'll explain the direction that our party will go," Kim Hyun-Sung announced.

"Okay."

"You can listen while eating comfortably," Kim Hyun-Sung told them.

"Sure."

"It's regarding raising your stats, abilities, and changing jobs," Kim Hyun-Sung started to explain.

"Are you talking about a new job, bro?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Yes, that's right."

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1. The pov switched to Kim Hyun-Sung ☜

CHAPTER 75
THIRD JOB (1)

The timing wasn't bad. It felt like they had somewhat settled down and from Kim Hyun-Sung's point of view, he thought that it was the best time to officially start making a move. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that there weren't any outside factors that could get in their way.

The situation with the Red Mercenary Group and the Black Swan Guild was close to the end and what Lee Ji-Hye said came true.

'All of you are the winner. It's your victory. Lindel will be peaceful as usual and it'll be safer than before. Let's all do our best in our respective positions.'

The article was released along with the news that Jung Yoo-Ra's apology was accepted. This kind of comment wasn't enough to calm down the public, however, it wasn't like there weren't any changes. When the press continued to instigate the public in breaking free from the oppression of the large guilds, the public cheered for their victory and were satisfied. They were happy to see even one person fighting against the suppression of a large guild.

I was also very satisfied with the result. A few days after I made my announcement, the Black Swan Guild made an announcement about reorganizing their command system and donating to new adventurers. There was a heated argument, but no one thought badly about it. I was sure that the executives from the Black Swan Guild apologizing with their heads down was the reason why the public didn't think badly about it. Since none of the executives from the large guilds had done this before, it was a very new scene for the public.

If there was one thing that remained unsolved, it was Jung Ha-Yan's reaction after Lee Ji-Hye left that day. Even though she didn't immediately show any strong emotions, she did show signs of anxiety. She became more clingy than before as she was trying to get rid of her anxiety by being with me. Basically, she became even more aggressive and if I were to explain it, she became a bit more straightforward.

'It's not good.'

It might be obvious, but I wasn't happy with these changes.

As of right now, Jung Ha-Yan would ask things like.

'Where are you going, oppa?'

Or…

'When are you coming back?'

I was bothered by it because this kind of obsession would work against me. I was sure that she was thinking that I have some sort of connection with Lee Ji-Hye. She must have noticed that strange mood between me and Lee Ji-Hye. Even though Jung Ha-Yan pretended not to know anything, I think she caught on to the fact that there was a strange tension between me and Lee Ji-Hye. It wouldn't be strange at all for Jung Ha-Yan to catch on since the system even acknowledged Lee Ji-Hye as my soulmate. I think she was more worried about Lee Ji-Hye than the Mercenary Queen even though the latter and I were sort of a fake couple. I had to control her and it was a thought I always needed to keep in mind. If this continued, I could be dragged around by her for the rest of my life.

Anyway, whether it was internally or externally, it was the perfect time to grow. Excluding the crazy gramps of the Blue Guild, there weren't any external factors that could suppress us. It was perfect thanks to the good relationship of the guilds within the Three Power Alliance. As such, the dungeon and hunting culture improved a little and we were receiving support from all over through the press. It seemed like we were about to soar. Those were what currently surrounded Kim Hyun-Sung's party.

"I'm sure you're all aware, but there are two factors that are needed in order to change your job. Gaining experience through a hunt and repeating the specific action of a job. The same thing applies to increasing our stats. If you use magic, your magic stats will increase and if you use your strength, your strength will increase," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"Of course," I answered.

"After our dungeon exploration last time, we did take a break due to various reasons, but there's a need to grow faster than we are now. It would be ideal if we all grew to Miss Sun Hee-Young's current level, no, I think being on the same level as the people that participated in the dungeon last time would be the best. It's time for us to get rid

of the beginner title," he said.

"I see."

"We need to change jobs at least three or four times and our stats need to be in the 60s. That's all I ask from all of you," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

It was a difficult task, but an easy one at the same time. The comment was probably for me, Park Deok-Gu, and the kid, Kim Ye-Ri, but it sounded like he was specifically saying it to me and Kim Ye-Ri. Even though he couldn't check our stats himself, he must have felt it. Jung Ha-Yan's magic was in the high 40s and Kim Hyun-Sung's stats were already over 50 points. Even though Sun Hee-Young joined later than us, there was no need to mention her stats and even though Park Deok-Gu's growth was slow, his growth was there. The young Kim Ye-Ri was the same and it seemed that I was the only nuisance in Kim Hyun-Sung's party.

'Hm.'

Kim Ye-Ri was in a better situation than I am because she had above legendary potential, so her growth was only a matter of time.

I was a nuisance in his party and it wasn't because I chose the wrong path for my growth. My job as an alchemist allowed me to cover my weak magic and the job kind of suited me. Unfortunately, it couldn't be categorized as a combat job. Of course, it was natural for me to think that way since I didn't know what I would look like once I had completely grown. But there were times when I thought that it wouldn't have been a bad idea if I chose black mage back then. I was sure that there was going to be a limit to my growth, but I would have been stronger than I am today.

Of course…

'Under the condition that this place isn't the Holy Empire.'

"*Ugh*…"

"One month. I think it would be great if all of you could change to your third job and reach a certain level in stats within one month," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"It's easier said than done. Even though I don't know how to get a job, the growth rate of my stats has slowed down no matter how hard I train… I'm sure it'll be

different if we went on a hunt, but…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"I'm sure it's possible," Kim Hyun-Sung said, interrupting him.

"How…"

"We'll start by first going out to hunt. Until we reach our goals, I don't think we should return to the city," he answered.

"*Hm.*"

"Five people will be going on the expedition. It'll be everyone excluding Mr. Ki-Young."

"What are you talking about? Hyung-nim is…"

Honestly, I felt my heart drop for a moment. It was only natural for me to react that way since it sounded like he was telling me that he was no longer going to carry me. My body reacted first before I could even think about it.

"Th-That's not a good idea."

It was a short period of time, but I had so many thoughts. Was he planning on treating me like a non-combatant from now on? Was he trying to push me out of the main party? These were the kind of thoughts I was having.

Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan looked more surprised than me and even Sun Hee-Young didn't look happy either. I thought that maybe he was trying to decrease my influence within the party, but Kim Hyun-Sung looked really calm. Based on his personality, he wasn't the type to push me out just for that reason since I was a valuable party member under his care.

Even though my heart was beating fast, I calmly asked and Kim Hyun-Sung answered while nodding.

"Oh," I said.

"Mr. Deok-Gu and Miss Ha-Yan grew up in a very good environment and it also applies to Miss Hee-Young who's not used to hunting. I'm not talking about easy hunts with no challenge at all. Of course, I'm not ignoring your hard work, but

because of Mr. Ki-Young's presence, all of you have been living very comfortably because he provides everyone here a kind of mental stability," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"Mental stability?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

I understood what he meant, no, I truly understood him, but I didn't necessarily agree.

"If I were to exaggerate a bit, Mr. Ki-Young's presence has been blocking your growth and even though I'm a bit embarrassed to say this, I've come to the conclusion that my presence has been affecting all of you in a bad way. I'll be going out to the expedition with all of you, but I won't step in as much. I believe it'll be better if the four of you handle the situation together without me and Mr. Ki-Young," he said.

'His overestimation was ridiculous.'

The fact that I was a nuisance was the answer, although the way I interpreted it was different from his. The fact that I wasn't growing wasn't the problem, but rather, I was a problem because I was a nuisance in their growth. I did think that maybe Kim Hyun-Sung was overestimating me, but it was true that both Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu relied on me a lot. However, I didn't think that my presence had that much influence to the point that I would hinder their growth. To be honest, it was to the point that maybe Kim Hyun-Sung was mistaken about something.

"Mr. Ki-Young looks as if he doesn't understand."

"I do feel that way because Ha-Yan and Deok-Gu…"

"You contribute to the party a lot more than you think, Mr. Ki-Young. I'm not sure what the others think, but that's what I noticed. If I were to exaggerate, there's a big chance that this expedition will fail because you won't be there, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung said, interrupting me.

"Th-That's not true. I mean even if that was true how can oppa… f-for one month…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"We're not kids, dude. Of course, I acknowledge the fact that Ki-Young hyung-nim is amazing, but…" Park Deok-Gu said.

“I’m speaking as the leader of the party. There’s no turning back. Mr. Ki-Young will not participate in this expedition and excluding myself, the four of you will take care of the hunt and the dungeon capture,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Everyone looked like they didn’t understand, but they nodded for now.

‘Not bad.’

I was a bit confused, but if Kim Hyun-Sung believed that this was the growth path we should take, then I was certain that he was right. I had no idea about Park Deok-Gu, but Jung Ha-Yan had to get used to me not being there all the time. I liked that she was following me, but maintaining a certain distance was more helpful than being completely attached. Jung Ha-Yan looked at me as if she couldn’t believe the fact that we had to be apart for a month, but I wasn’t planning on going against Kim Hyun-Sung’s decision.

“*Huu…”*

“Well, I agree with you, Mr. Hyun-Sung. If that’ll help them grow, then I think it’s worth a try,” I said.

The problem was me, not them. If this happened after Kim Hyun-Sung stopped carrying me, then I could have been on the verge of being kicked out.

It was a good thing for the party members to become stronger, but if they got stronger to the point that I couldn’t keep up with them anymore, then it may cause bigger problems later on.

‘Anything but that.’

Seeing as how he excluded me from the expedition, I thought that maybe the regressor had other plans. I was sure that he had a present for me since I looked like I had low potential.

Increase in stats and changing jobs… These were sweet words. I wasn’t sure what he prepared, but he could have prepared a very sweet gift.

“Then during that time, I should…”

But I guess that was nothing more than my misunderstanding. Kim Hyun-Sung’s

smiling face was full of trust that was unknown to me.

“The same applies to you, Mr. Ki-Young. For a month, you just need to do everything you have to do with the thought of increasing your stats and changing your job,” he said.

“Oh… I see,” I said.

“We’ll leave as soon as possible and Mr. Ki-Young, please do not help us with this process either. I think it’ll be more meaningful if we make preparations from the start. Don’t worry about us and focus on your own growth,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Okay…” I weakly said.

I wasn’t sure where his confidence was coming from, but his trust in me was boundless. It seemed like he had a change of heart, but I never imagined that I would be in this situation.

“I leave it up to you while I’m not here. I trust you, Mr. Ki-Young,” he said.

‘Don’t trust me, you bastard.’

Was what I wanted to say to him.

CHAPTER 76
THIRD JOB (2)

Being trusted by the regressor was of course a good thing, but I didn't like this type of trust. I didn't know what his evaluation of me was like, but if I were to exaggerate a little, I was like a child that still needed Kim Hyun-Sung's attention and love. It was even more applicable when it came to a growth plan like this. Of course, if I were asked why I was making such a fuss over something simple as changing jobs and increasing our stats, I wouldn't really have an answer. Still, I wasn't used to this kind of overestimation.

'Don't trust me so much, you bastard.'

Although I had been giving off the vibe that I could do well on my own, I didn't like the current situation. However, I completely understood why Kim Hyun-Sung made this kind of decision.

'There's a good chance that this expedition is going to fail.'

I was also starting to realize the fact that the party members were only able to safely hunt because of the mental stability I gave them.

"I-I'm not going to go either. I don't want to go. I'll never go," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"…"

Jung Ha-Yan was the problem. The closer it got to the expedition date, the more excuses she gave about why she didn't want to go and the more dumbfounded I got. On the first day that Kim Hyun-Sung mentioned the expedition, she had started training in order to reach her stat and job goals. While the members were preparing for the expedition, she thought that she wouldn't have to go if she reached her stats and job goals. Unfortunately, even if she reached her goal, it was already decided that she was going to join the expedition. But she was still going to use her goals as an excuse to not go.

'It's obvious.'

It was impossible to show notable achievement in a short period of time even if one had legendary-ranked talent. Showing an enormous amount of growth in a short period of time was astonishing, but they wouldn't be able to reach their goals.

In the end, Jung Ha-Yan showed signs of anxiety, but it closely resembled the stage when a terminally-ill patient had accepted their death.

The stages were denial, anger, compromise, depression, and acceptance. It didn't take long for her to reach the first stage because she started denying the fact that we had to be apart for a month or she believed that it was a joke and it wasn't actually going to be a full month. She seemed as if she had never imagined us being apart. Jung Ha-Yan looked at hardworking Park Deok-Gu and Sun Hee-Young from afar as if she was looking at someone else and acted as if the meeting earlier never happened. But as time passed and the day of the expedition was getting closer, she started to face reality. The stage that came after was anger.

'…'

Jung Ha-Yan started disliking Kim Hyun-Sung for suddenly coming up with the expedition schedule. I guess he could be considered lucky because she didn't seem to have any murderous intent toward him. She must have considered him as a comrade that she experienced life and death with. Still, she started yelling by herself in her room more often and was showing her temperamental side more often. Excluding myself, she even got angry at the weakest in the party, Kim Ye-Ri.

Jung Ha-Yan was trying to find a reason to escape from this expedition. She seemed to have reached the conclusion that they were given this homework because the bow user kid was lacking, but she didn't get mad or yell directly at Kim Ye-Ri because Jung Ha-Yan was pure and innocent. Instead of taking her anger out at Kim Ye-Ri, she would look in a certain direction, call her stupid, and curse her cutely. According to Park Deok-Gu, she came up to him and talked about Kim Ye-Ri behind her back, and considering her nature, such actions didn't fit her at all.

When she moved on to the next step, she started talking a lot.

'Compromise?'

As if she was possessed by me, she started offering a variety of conditions.

'I can work really hard. I can really increase my stat without having to go to the

expedition and I can work harder. So please. Please. Sob.'

Or…

'Then how about leaving for only a week? I think it'll be more effective.'

Or…

'I think it'll be better if oppa went too and just watched like you, Mr. Hyun-Sung.'

These were some of the things she said to bargain. Since the goal and stat values were very specific, it got to the point where she started thinking that it would be more effective if she remained here. When she showed a statistical analysis comparing the changes to her stats if she stayed here or if she went on the hunt, I was at a loss for words. I even noticed her offering different conditions to Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and Sun Hee-Young.

Jung Ha-Yan strangely encouraged them that they should officially protest and this type of encouragement was what helped Park Deok-Gu make his decision. It was simply an assumption, but I thought that maybe Park Deok-Gu was in the compromise stage because he actually visited me. He reflected back on himself while looking at Jung Ha-Yan.

The most difficult stage was the next stage—depression.

'Depression.'

Jung Ha-Yan became noticeably thinner and there were many nights when she cried herself to sleep. I guess she must have realized the condition her body was in because she constantly said that she couldn't join the hunt because she wasn't feeling well and it was to the point that she looked like a severely depressed patient. She would stare out into the sky pretty often.

'I really don't want to. I really don't… '

She also didn't talk to herself as much as before.

Not only was it a hard time for Jung Ha-Yan, but it was a hard time for me as well because I had to comfort her more often. Of course, I would either mention a reward or calm her down by giving her all the rewards that were overdue, but I thought that

the fact that she had to be away from me for a month was so shocking that those happy times went down the drain. She enjoyed it when I comforted her, but in the end, her depression must have overpowered me. Jung Ha-Yan found it scarier when the time we spent together became sweeter and sweeter. The fourth stage ended with her crying amidst our skinship.

The last stage was the biggest problem because Jung Ha-Yan wasn't accepting it. Since I watched her go through all four stages, I thought she would eventually accept it, but I guess she wasn't the type to accept things that she didn't want so easily. Forcing her to accept it was the correct description because she denied her reality until the end and to make things worse, even when it was the day before the expedition, she didn't want to believe that she had to go. She cried about it, but it wasn't effective. It was a decision that the party had made and it was my decision as well, so Jung Ha-Yan had no choice but to follow.

Basically, she prepared to be apart for a month by going through the stages of denial, anger, compromise, depression, and forced acceptance. It was really difficult to imagine how it would impact her if we had to be apart for a year or if we never saw each other again.

Apart from meeting me and forming a strange personality, Jung Ha-Yan wasn't used to being apart. After being abandoned by her sisters and parents, she had to spend a long time by herself and I was sure that those experiences greatly contributed to her current personality.

Anyway, apart from her showing that particular side of hers, time continued to pass and the day of the expedition was getting closer and closer. Honestly, I knew that the preparations weren't going well. Jung Ha-Yan looked like she was having a difficult time maintaining her mental health and although I didn't understand the reason, Park Deok-Gu also looked like he wasn't doing well. Sun Hee-Young looked like she was calmly thinking about what was going to happen after, but she was a bit stressed about not having done any charity work recently. As for Kim Ye-Ri, I honestly had no idea what she was thinking.

Truthfully, it was really difficult to watch the party members prepare for an expedition without me. It might seem obvious, but I wasn't anxious because I was afraid of getting abandoned.

'Have they always been this big of a mess?'

That was the thought I had because Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan were acting strange and Sun Hee-Young wasn't used to expeditions. I somewhat expected the preparations to be lacking since there was a kid in the party too, but I never imagined that it would be this bad. Like what Kim Hyun-Sung said earlier, as soon as he took his hands away from the process, the rest of the party would have no idea what to do. As such, I was naturally worried.

"Are you really going to leave just like this?" I asked.

"Yes, not getting involved is the right thing to do. Our party members are too used to receiving orders and I'm sure that you felt that as well, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

"I did…"

"I'm sure they'll come to realize this during the expedition."

"…"

"When I said that they would carry out the expedition while being psychologically comfortable, it applied to the current situation and I'm sure it'll be more noticeable during the hunt… I'm certain that Mr. Deok-Gu and Miss Hee-Young's growth stats are high and I don't need to talk about Miss Ha-Yan, so to be honest, everyone has a problem. If you and I went with them, I'm sure there won't be any accidents, but think about what will happen if we aren't there…" Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

The current situation would happen again.

I understood what Kim Hyun-Sung was saying. Hunting wasn't simply the only factor and he must have thought that the command system within his party was an issue as well. Even though Kim Hyun-Sung was the leader and I was the alternative, there wasn't anyone else after us. If Sun Hee-Young, Jung Ha-Yan, or Park Deok-Gu took charge and led the direction of the expedition, then the preparation process would become easier, but no one asked any questions nor did they find any answers.

'I can probably do this' or 'this is probably enough' were most likely the kind of thoughts they were having. If I were to explain it in simple terms, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that this expedition training was also a process for us to find an alternative to us within our party.

'Will it work?'

Honestly, I was a bit skeptical when I saw our party members. They were going on a month-long expedition, but the goods they prepared weren't enough and it seemed like they didn't prepare the equipment and tools they personally needed either. If I had to give an example, it felt as if they were children preparing for a trip because the only thing Kim Ye-Ri prepared was a bow and arrows. I guess Jung Ha-Yan didn't really understand the meaning of traveling far because she was focused on taking items that reminded her of me.

'This is… '

This was worse than bad.

If the guilds and groups that invested in us saw us right now, they would definitely get busy trying to get their investments back.

"Still… they should at least prepare the basic necessities…" I said.

"They've somewhat prepared the really basic items since Mr. Deok-Gu and Miss Hee-Young made the preparations. I'm also worried about it, but it's the right thing to do. They'll realize the difference once they experience it firsthand," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"I see," I nodded.

"Let's head out," he said.

"Okay."

When I went outside with Kim Hyun-Sung, I saw the party members waiting for us. Even though they were holding a pretty big bag, I knew that it contained useless items. When I looked at Park Deok-Gu who looked as if the preparations were perfect, I couldn't help but sigh. I wasn't sure whether they knew my frustration, but each of them started making comments.

"Don't worry so much, hyung-nim. I'm sure it won't take an entire month!" Park Deok-Gu said.

It was going to take more than a month.

“I leave it up to you while I’m not here, Mr. Ki-Young. I am bothered by the fact that I haven’t been able to do any volunteer work…” Sun Hee-Young said.

In this expedition, they might be the ones that would need help.

“Oppa… oppa…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

Even after she hugged me while crying, I didn’t feel heartbroken at all.

“P-Please take care of yourself. A-And…” she said.

“Yeah, don’t worry, Ha-Yan,” I told her.

Because I was more worried about you guys.

She seemed worried that I might meet someone else while she was gone, but I guess the pain of being apart impacted her more.

When Kim Hyun-Sung said it was time to leave, I slightly pushed Jung Ha-Yan away. But she seemed like she wasn’t going to let go of me at all. She was using all her strength to hold on. Of course, she did let go of me in the end, but it was difficult to look at her face which was covered in tears and snot.

“We’re heading out.”

“D-Don’t worry,” Park Deok-Gu said.

‘Path of suffering.’

In this expedition, the party wasn’t going to be carried by Kim Hyun-Sung. I was certain that this journey was going to be more painful than any path that a monk had walked on.

‘Not going with them might actually be a good thing.’

I was half-serious about this.

CHAPTER 77
THIRD JOB (3)

The usually noisy second floor of the guild house was oddly quiet; I couldn’t get used to it.

‘I guess I’ve grown attached to them.’

I never imagined that I would feel this way even though it hadn’t been that long since they left, but of course, it wasn't to the point where I was feeling lonely because they weren't there. I was only reacting this way because of the sudden change in the environment. It was actually kind of fun. I couldn’t deny the fact that I felt oddly uncomfortable all this time because I rarely had time to myself since Jung Ha-Yan was always watching where I was, Park Deok-Gu would randomly visit me, and Sun Hee-Young would often ask me to go volunteer with her. Fortunately, Kim Ye-Ri wouldn’t initiate any talk with me. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that I wouldn’t have a personal life if that kid started making a fuss as well. Even though I had to figure out everything on my own for the time being, it felt like I was on vacation.

‘It doesn’t change the fact that I still need to work desperately.’

In order to achieve the third job and stats increase that Kim Hyun-Sung had set as a goal, I needed to work just as desperately as the other party members. I wasn’t sure what part about me made Kim Hyun-Sung think that I would be able to catch up to them, but I was sure that he had a plan.

I wasn’t actually in a bad situation. I had epic-ranked alchemy equipment and a ton of catalysts and materials, so I was already growing. The problem was my intelligence stat, not my overall stats. Since it was impossible for me to raise my other stats from the start, I didn’t have a choice in which stats I wanted to increase. This was why the third job change was really important. I wasn’t even thinking about using my combat ability, but I believe I am a helpful member of the party. Still, there was a limit to me simply following the party around and doing research. I couldn’t help but think of the different possibilities as I slowly grew and they were answers to problems that hadn't happened yet. It was a way to have the minimum combat

ability without losing my uniqueness as an alchemist.

'First the homunculus… '

This opportunity could be mine since I chose the alchemist job. It was very advantageous for me because I can control beings that were similar to summons without having to use my mana. In *Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy*, he wrote a very in-depth analysis regarding a homunculus.

[A homunculus is a creature artificially created without borrowing a woman's womb. Since every school interprets it differently, everyone's opinion of it may be slightly different, but as the author, I'll define the homunculus as a man-made creature. Of course, I'm not referring to a chimera. Unlike a chimera that was created out of something, the homunculus that we alchemists control is created out of nothing.]

A homunculus was an artificial life, but I didn't know what it looked like or what it could do. To make things worse, Tucker only wrote down his theory in his book. He wrote a detailed comparison between a chimera and a homunculus saying that a chimera was a creature that was created with the concept of genetic manipulation while a homunculus was a living creature that was created, therefore, they were distinctly different. It was possible that homunculus was a mysterious topic even for Tucker. No, even if he did manage to create a living creature, I was sure that he wouldn't go around saying that he created a living creature because that was basically playing god.

'Second is the liquid medicine.'

In this world, liquid medicines were called potions. If I was asked whether someone would be able to obtain combat abilities by simply drinking a potion, I would definitely shake my head, but this theory was simply based on my imagination.

'Can I put magic into a potion?'

Simply put, the magic principle of this continent was this: one would stack their mana and recite a spell in order to imagine the spell. A completed spell resided either on the caster's arm or a specific body part and the spell would activate when

the caster triggered it. Then would it be impossible for a completed spell to reside in a potion or a specific item instead of the body?

It was that kind of experiment. I thought of some items that had magic contained in them, but these types of items weren't created by humans. In addition, they were finished products.

There were some magic schools that enchanted items with magic, but those items were lacking and weren't very effective. It was the case of the tail wagging the dog, so I stopped the research. If an alchemist that used alchemy magic could contain a one-time use magic by utilizing a magic circle, then not only would it help me, but I was also sure that it would be very successful commercially.

'The third is the chimera.'

It was a way of creating a summoned beast by manipulating their genes. Honestly, I thought that this was the easiest method because even in this world, monsters were an exciting topic. Simply creating a chimera was easy. There were a few monsters that had similar genes and if I actually experimented by mixing their genes, the monster would definitely live. However, controlling that monster was the job of a black mage, not an alchemist. My magic wasn't enough to control a chimera. Of course, I could catch a young monster, train it and then raise it, but the problem was whether that method would actually work. After all, I didn't want to get eaten by the chimera that I raised.

'Not only that… '

I came up with a lot of other methods because to me, this was directly connected to my survival. It was very dangerous, but I even thought about experimenting directly on my body and also thought about crafting a Sage's Stone. However, I felt like it wouldn't be very effective and I didn't think that I was skilled enough to control it yet.

I had been procrastinating, but now was the time to decide which growth path I was going to take. Not only was it important for me to be just as busy as the regressor's group, but working effectively was the most important in my opinion. Of course, these couldn't be done in a short period of time and I didn't want to spend my time constantly experimenting and failing. There was already something that could prevent that.

'Getting help… '

It wasn't a bad idea. If there was something I didn't understand, I could ask and if I got stuck during my research, then asking for advice was common sense.

Even though magic and alchemy were two different paths, their roots were the same and it was the same for the other types of jobs. Since everyone interprets things differently, asking for help was the most reasonable method to get out of a bottleneck.

'The Devil's Guild would be the best, right?'

It wasn't a bad decision. I had a feeling that if I asked the ones that begged me to include them in the Sage's Stone research, they would become faithful workers of Lee Ki-Young's lab.

Just as I walked into the cafeteria while having various thoughts…

"Are you eating by yourself today?"

"Oh," I said.

I heard a voice beside me. When I turned my head, I saw a young woman.

"Oh! I think this is our first meeting. I'm Hwang Jung-Yeon, the party leader of the Blue Guild's fifth party," he said.

"Oh, nice to meet you. I'm…"

"I know who you are. You're Lee Ki-Young, the alchemist of the seventh party, right?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"How was the Garden of Horror?" she asked.

It was sort of a random question, but I immediately realized why she asked.

'The discoverer.'

Hwang Jung-Yeon was the one that discovered the dungeon and gave us permission to enter it.

“It was a great experience, so thank you very much,” I answered.

“You’re quick-witted, just like the rumors,” she commented.

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” I said.

“Of course, it’s a compliment. But I do feel kind of bad. It would’ve been nice if you really did have a good experience… I don’t feel good about it because of that issue. A friend of mine from the Black Swan Guild asked me to tell you that they’re sorry, but I guess it’s a bit late now,” Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

“Oh, it’s fine! I’ve already received an apology from them and the issue’s pretty much resolved. It was actually an opportunity for me to realize just how much I lacked,” It told her.

“I feel much better after hearing that from you. This is my first time talking to a member of the much anticipated seventh party. I’m so happy,” she quipped.

Her face and voice were slightly calm. I think relaxed was the best way to describe her face. Even though she looked a bit young, her mood reminded me of the past for some reason. It wasn’t really suitable for a woman that lived in the modern age, but she gave off the maiden of a respectable family vibe.

“Actually, it’s been a while since I returned from my expedition, but all the members of party seven are always together, so it wasn’t easy for me to talk to you,” Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

“Oh, I see,” I said.

“I’ve been looking forward to the day when all of us managed to go out and eat, but the other parties haven’t returned from their expeditions yet… and the guild has been busy recently. I guess nobody had the time,” she explained.

“Ohh, I did hear about it. I heard they entered an epic-ranked dungeon…” I said.

“Yes, but you seem like you have something on your mind…” she said.

"*Hm…*"

She was obviously a mage. I guess she must have surmised that it was a struggle that only two people with similar jobs would understand. She seemed like a very nosy person considering how she talked to her hoobae that was sitting quietly and even gave up ownership of the dungeon, but that nosy part of her was obviously a big help to me.

Even if I didn't use Mind's Eye to look at Hwang Jung-Yeon's stats, I realized that she was a talented mage. I had a vague idea of what her stats were since she didn't try to hide her magic and the brilliance in her eyes was noticeable. I was sure that her laid-back personality was influenced by the unique magic power she possessed.

'I think she's useful… '

I didn't think that there was a need for me to ask the Devil's Guild for help anymore since it seemed like she wouldn't mind it if I asked her a lot of questions.

"I'm a bit embarrassed, but I do have something on my mind. I feel like I haven't been able to decide which path I should take recently," I answered.

"Yes, I understand. It happens," she said.

"There are a lot of choices, but I honestly have no idea which path I should take…" I continued.

"I understand that as well because everyone experiences it, but I'm sure it applies to you more, Mr. Ki-Young," she said.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"You're contemplating between the Mercenary Queen and Miss Ha-Yan, right? You've been dating one since you were on Earth and you experienced life and death with the other… it's only natural for you to have a hard time choosing," she said.

"Sorry?" I asked again.

"It may be difficult to understand with the modern ethics where polygamy and monogamy are taken for granted, but choosing both could be the answer as well," she answered.

"…"

Since she was staring at my extremely flustered expression, it only took a second for her to realize that we were talking about two different things. Hwang Jung-Yeon had been smiling as she talked, but she quickly became quiet.

"Oh, so it wasn't about that," she said.

"Yes."

"I-I'm sorry. You were thinking so hard, so I definitely thought it was…"

"…"

She looked a bit embarrassed. She was trying her best to fix the awkward atmosphere, but it wasn't working out. This was a similar feeling I felt somewhere else.

'They're similar… '

Their impression and looks were completely different, no, their race was completely different. The face that I was imagining was of a pig that looked like a bandit and the woman that was in front of me had the image of a good wife and wise mother.[1] But in conclusion, I realized that this woman gave off a similar vibe as Park Deok-Gu.

'They're alike.'

I had a feeling that it was going to get annoying if we found something in common. While I was thinking whether it would be best to leave, I heard her talk. "I'm sorry, I must have been out of my mind. It's been a while since I watched a drama… I assumed things unknowingly," she explained.

"Oh, I see…" I said.

"It's just you're so close to both of them. To be honest, there are times when I smile without knowing it whenever I see Miss Ha-Yan with you… it seems like Miss Ha-Yan really likes you, Mr. Ki-Young, so maybe that's why she's been using that spell," Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

"What spell?" I asked.

“A location tracking spell. I’m not sure if it’s okay for me to be here with you like this because I’m sure she’s getting information about who you are with…” she answered.

“*Huh?*”

“You don’t need to be embarrassed about it. You even handed her a part of your body. How romantic,” she said.

“…”

“…”

“Were you… not aware of this?” she asked.

“…”

“You can’t pretend… wait, you really didn’t know about it?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

The information she revealed was shocking, to say the least.

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1. Good wife, wise mother’ (현모양처) goes back to the late 1800s when women in East Asian societies were expected to have good domestic skills (good wife) and raise moral and smart sons for the country (wise mother) ☜

CHAPTER 78
THIRD JOB (4)

I was really shocked by the news. It was so ridiculous that I started laughing uncontrollably. However, before I could even organize my thoughts, the face of the person that used such a spell on me naturally popped into my head. Based on their personality and actions up until now, the culprit was clear.

'Jung Ha-Yan.'

It was definitely Jung Ha-Yan. Different guilds and clans popped into my head, but I was sure that they wouldn't go through the trouble for someone like me.

The only suspects were the three women who were obsessed with me, but among them, Cha Hee-Ra was in a bit of an awkward position, so she was excluded. I couldn't imagine her using a mage to cast a tracking spell on me and no matter how much I thought about it, there wasn't a reason for her to do this.

The other suspect was Lee Ji-Hye, but because she had neither the time nor the ability to do that, she was excluded. No, if someone had cast a spell on me before this, then I definitely would have noticed, so basically, the culprit was the person that could cast a spell on me without me noticing it. It meant that they entered my room while I was resting or sleeping and used the spell. Of course, Jung Ha-Yan was the only person that could do that. It gave me goosebumps when I imagined her reciting a spell while watching me sleep.

'What the hell… '

Before entering the guild house, Jung Ha-Yan would come near me every night and do different things, but thinking about it now, I had never woken up in the middle of my sleep after entering the guild house.

'Since when?'

I concluded that it really was her. Honestly, it really wouldn't matter if I ignored it and moved on, but after thinking that it was connected to Jung Ha-Yan, I felt strange.

After thinking about whether it was really a coincidence that I never woke up during the night after I started sleeping in the guild house, I eventually found the answer.

'It can't be a coincidence.'

When I thought about the possibility of her casting a sleeping spell on me and doing this and that, I started clearing my throat because I couldn't be more stupefied. Of course it was just an assumption, but if everything was true, then it meant that I indirectly provided sex education to Jung Ha-Yan after coming here.

'Gasp… '

After hiding my embarrassment, I slightly looked up and noticed Hwang Jung-Yeon's face turning pale as if she had made a really big mistake. If I were her, I would have reacted the same way. If I had to compare it to the modern world, it was like telling the husband that his wife was delusionally jealous and was constantly watching over him.

I wasn't sure how pure our relationship looked to others, but for some reason, Hwang Jung-Yeon looked as if she was walking on thin ice.

After coming back to my senses, I spoke again because I felt like I needed to know a little more about this issue.

"Could you explain it to me in detail?"

"Huh? Excuse me?" she asked.

Knowing the exact details was important so I could be more careful.

"Well… that's…" she said.

"I'd appreciate it if you could tell me the details," I said.

"You see…"

Seeing her being hesitant made me feel even more anxious. It was because I was worried that there might be something more into this that I wasn't aware of. I had never heard anyone say that wiretapping was possible on this continent, but if it was Jung Ha-Yan, then I was sure that she would have been able to develop a whole new

spell.

“Telling you the details is a b-bit… are you sure it’s okay?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“I’ll be fine. I was a bit surprised, but… I want to know. I somewhat expected it… so I’m not too worried about it,” I answered.

“If that’s how you feel, then I guess I should tell you. I-I was really surprised too,” she stuttered.

“Please. I know that Ha-Yan is the really jealous type… I think she used that spell on me because of that,” I told her.

“Oh my. Well, it’s understandable considering the rumor about you and the Mercenary Queen. I-I completely understand,” she said.

“…”

“No wonder it was hidden away deep inside…” she said.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“I’m sure an ordinary person hasn’t caught on. Swordsmen and people with similar jobs probably haven’t noticed the spell that was used on you, Mr. Ki-Young. The same goes for mages. It’s a very well-planned and intricate spell that if a mage isn’t sensitive to magic like me or… they’re just an ordinary mage, it’ll be difficult for them to sense it. Unless their magic stat is over 80, they probably wouldn’t notice it. The spell is very faint and it was designed so that it seamlessly blends into the wavelength of your unique mana,” she explained.

Oh…” I said.

“Even I think it’s exciting. I guess the rumors about her being a genius weren’t a lie because I didn’t even think about using magic this way. It won’t be easy to imitate it since our fields are slightly different. It’s understandable that… you haven’t noticed it, Mr. Ki-Young since you’re an alchemist,” she said.

“I see…”

“But I can tell you what kind of magic was used since the spell itself was borrowed

from a basic spell," she said.

"Okay."

"As I've mentioned before, the first spell that was used on you was a tracking magic. Just like the name, it was designed to simply see the target's location. This isn't all that interesting. The second spell is the one that I find a bit interesting," Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

"What about it?" I asked.

"The spell is similar to the safety zones that are created within the dungeon. You can think of it as a spell that starts ringing when a living thing enters a certain radius. It's probably about 50 centimeters in radius… basically, if a person approaches you within a certain distance, the spell will send a signal. Of course, I have no idea what happens after the signal is sent…" she explained.

"I see."

"In order to cast these kinds of spells, the caster usually needs either the subject's body part or blood to use as a catalyst… did you really not give anything to her?" she asked.

"What happens if she doesn't have a catalyst?" I asked.

"It's impossible to cast these kinds of spells without it. It was probably difficult to discover it because this spell was transformed to match the wavelength of your mana and when using a tracking spell, a catalyst is required. Without it… it's impossible to activate it…" she answered.

"I do remember something…" I said.

"I see…"

"Will a strand of hair work as well? Or maybe a nail?" I asked.

"No, it's impossible with just a strand of hair. She'll probably need a handful of them to make it work," she answered.

Of course, I never gave her a handful of my hair, but it didn't mean that I couldn't

think of anything else at all. Before this, I recalled Jung Ha-Yan picking up my tooth from a dungeon, and the thought of it astonished me. I didn't think much of it during that time, but I never imagined that it would lead to something like this. Thinking about it now, I felt like I was under a spell while I was with Lee Ji-Hye. Jung Ha-Yan didn't catch on to the strange atmosphere between us. She simply knew that Lee Ji-Hye had stepped within the off-limits area that she had set up.

'So that's how… '

The reason why Jung Ha-Yan looked at Lee Ji-Hye with hostility was that she stepped within that area.

"Oh my, I don't think she's being too jealous… you… you must feel troubled," she said.

Hwang Jung-Yeon looked a bit excited for someone that was worried about me. I wasn't sure if this was the correct description, but she had the same expression that my mother had whenever she watched soap operas.

"Ahem… Did she use any spell on me that could make her either hear or watch me from afar?" I asked.

"No, she only used two spells. She's very clever to the point that I'm surprised… I can't believe that she was able to perfect a magic like this when she's just a rookie that had just arrived here. I'm sure it was possible since the spell only consumed a small amount of mana… I think she can even write a thesis about this," she commented.

I was pretty sure that the title of the thesis would be: How to Stalk Your Boyfriend.

"*Ugh… '*

"I think I can break it if you want me to… do you want me to try?" she asked.

"No, not right now," I answered.

"Oh my, I guess you're the type that wants to be tied down. It's a bit strange but romantic in some ways," she said.

'Romantic my ass.'

The information was very appalling, but it was so ridiculous that I actually became calm. I already knew that Jung Ha-Yan was obsessed with me and I wasn't sure if it was my personality that was strange, but if I could control her perfectly with this amount of sacrifice, then it wasn't that bad. Of course, it didn't mean that I didn't get goosebumps from it. I felt a sense of resistance that was difficult to explain, but… I could pretend like I never noticed these.

Anyway, knowing that this kind of spell was used on me was good material and I started to become curious as to whether she had installed something in my room.

"If it's okay with you, do you mind coming to my room?" I asked.

"Excuse me?" she asked.

I felt more embarrassed because she looked like she was on guard against me.

"I-I appreciate the o-offer, but it's a bit… sudden and embarrassing. It's not that you're not charming, but… you already have a lot of women around you… and joining you in this kind of situation is a little bit romantic, but I prefer a man with a large frame that's cozy…" Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

"That's not what I meant," I told her.

"Oh…"

"I was hoping you could tell me what kind of spells were used in my room," I explained.

"*Ohhh*… o-of course," she said.

Once again, I felt Park Deok-Gu's vibe from this woman.

"Let's head upstairs! I was actually curious about the expensive workshop that you have upstairs. It seems that today's my lucky day," she exclaimed in glee.

"It's my lucky day as well," I commented.

If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have known that such spells had been used on me. When I quietly got up, I noticed Hwang Jung-Yeon looking at me very excitedly. Unlike me who was pretty calm, this woman looked as if she was watching a drama.

The more I walked to the second floor, the heavier my steps felt, but it was better to take care of everything at once.

“So this is the place that the seventh party’s using. Just like the rumors, it’s nice,” she commented.

“It’s hard for me to explain since I’ve never been to another member’s room before,” I told her.

After looking around the place, the woman stopped in front of Park Deok-Gu’s room. I quietly looked at her face to see if she discovered something, but all I saw was her smile.

‘There’s no way… ’

The only thing I could do was beg that the worst scenario I imagined wouldn’t happen.

Anyway, our destination was my room, not Park Deok-Gu’s room.

When I calmly opened the door, I saw the same room that I saw every day. There were various books on the desk and various tools and equipment were stacked in the room. I was a bit embarrassed about the fact that I hadn’t cleaned my room just yet, but it would look even weirder if I started cleaning now.

“Your room’s really clean,” Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

“I see…”

“Oh my, I think you have more books than I do…” she commented.

“They’re books that I’ve read halfway and stopped,” I told her.

“But still, studying is a good thing. Oh, what am I doing? You want me to check to see if a similar spell was used in this room, right?” she asked.

“Yes, that’s right,” I answered.

“One moment.”

It seemed like she started looking around the room after pouring mana into her eyes. I never imagined that she would take it this seriously, but it was probably because she was conscious of Jung Ha-Yan's talent in magic.

Moments later, Hwang Jung-Yeon's expression very subtly changed. She looked like she was holding in her laughter, but she also looked excited. I even saw her wear a surprised look, which amplified my anxiety. After looking around the room, she started talking to me in a cautious tone. "There's something here."

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"I can see it on the wall and on your bed," she answered.

'…'

CHAPTER 79
THIRD JOB (5)

“I can see it on the wall and on your bed,” Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

“…”

“Can I tell you about the wall first?” she asked.

“Please,” I answered.

“Miss Ha-Yan is using the room right next to yours… right?” she asked.

“Yes, she is,” I said.

“Miss Ha-Yan’s kind of cunning,” she said.

I had an idea what she was going to say. From the start of the tutorial, I saw Jung Ha-Yan create a wall using illusion magic, but it was dumbfounding that I hadn’t caught on to the fact that she changed an entire wall. I tried touching the wall doubtfully, but the wall in front of me was an actual wall and not made of magic.

‘Maybe she didn’t change the entire wall?’

It was definitely an ordinary wall. I looked at Hwang Jung-Yeon with a slightly confused look and she spoke with excitement. “She didn’t change the entire wall. But there’s a small hole.”

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“Place your finger here and you’ll understand what I’m saying,” she told me.

As if she was trying to maintain a safe distance from me, I saw her slowly guiding me with her finger. When I slightly inserted my finger into the wall, the way my finger poked through really surprised me. I was shocked by the fact that I had been living all this time without realizing that there was a hole here. After touching it with my

hand, I was able to check the presence of magic.

“How could I not know…”

“I told you it was a faint spell. And since this entire room is already surrounded by magic, it’s understandable for you to not notice it. I’m sure you’re not that sensitive to magic either, Mr. Ki-Young… it also hasn’t been that long since this hole was made,” she explained.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes. I think it’s been less than a month… I’m not sure why Miss Ha-Yan was trying to peep into your room, but… I think I have an idea. Hehehe,” she said.

“Ah, I see…” I said.

I guess this could be considered a stroke of good luck in the midst of misfortune. Even though I couldn’t recall any rigorous activities happening in my room, thinking that Jung Ha-Yan was watching me even in my room made me feel uncomfortable. To make things worse, there had been times when I walked into my room and lay down on the bed naked after taking a shower. I felt a bit uncomfortable, but I guess I could understand it if we considered all these things as reasonable.

‘Since I’m the reason why… ’

I never imagined that it would turn out like this, but since I was the one that pulled Jung Ha-Yan into our group, this was something that I had to endure. It was to the point that I felt relieved that it ended here. But before I could nod, I heard Hwang Jung-Yeon’s voice again. “What surprised me the most was your bed.”

“My bed?” I asked.

“It’s not an exaggeration to say that this item is revolutionary,” she said.

“I see…” I said.

I felt bitter that she looked like she was having fun since it wasn’t directly related to her, but seeing her dumbfounded look, it made me think that there really was something unimaginable hidden in my bed.

When I glanced at her, she spoke as if she had been waiting for it.

“It's fatigue recovery magic,” she said.

“I see.”

“That’s not the only thing. Not only does it check your condition, but a variety of spells are used on it too. There are so many that I can’t explain each and every one of them. From energizing magic to improved brain activity and even a spell that increases blood circulation. There’s also a crime prevention spell and even a protection spell that’ll protect you if something happens. If a large spell falls on this guild house, you’ll probably be the only person that’ll be safe from it. Since the spells that were used are magic, it’s understandable for you to fall into a deep sleep. You’ve never felt tired after you’ve woken up, right?” she asked.

“Yes… I think so. There have been times where I felt really refreshed…” I answered.

“It’s only natural for you to feel that way since you slept on a bed like this. How romantic…” she commented.

Even if it was a tiny bit, I felt my heart warming up. I assumed that the spells used were the ones that I didn’t know about, but I never imagined that it would be these types of spells. What surprised me a bit was the fact that the type of magic Jung Ha-Yan used was known as enchantment.

“Then are you saying that she used those spells on the bed itself? That’s…”

“Yes, it’s impossible. Even if it was possible, it wouldn’t be very effective. Forcefully casting a spell on an item instead of a human being is something that many schools have given up on,” Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

“I can understand them since the majority of items with such effects on this continent are all finished products. I have personally looked into this matter as well,” I told her.

“That’s why I said it’s revolutionary. If I were to describe the concealment method of the tracking spell as thesis worthy, then the spells that were used on this bed will not only shake up the magic world, but it has the potential to create a whole new school. A rookie that’s been here for less than a year actually managed to cast a spell that only remarkable mages are able to cast. It’s to the point that as someone that does

extensive studies and research on magic, I feel ashamed," she explained.

"…"

"Of course, there are restrictions," she added.

I knew that there had to be. Even Jung Ha-Yan shouldn't be able to perfectly execute an enchantment since it was a field of research that many mages had tried and given up.

"This spell only activates for you, Mr. Ki-Young," she told me.

"I understand," I said.

"I think she used a catalyst for this as well. She probably used a part of your body and after compressing the spell a few times, she made it so that it only activates for you, Mr. Ki-Young. If the spell activated for everyone, then she wouldn't have been able to contain this kind of magic. It'll be very ineffective as well, so this bed is for your use only," Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

"I see, but still…"

"It'll probably be easier to understand it if I told you that the spell was only made possible because your genetic information and the genetic information contained in the catalyst are a match," she said.

I somewhat understood it.

"The second spell needs to be recharged through."

"I see."

"The caster has to put their mana into it at least once a month and considering that the spell has been maintained up until now, I guess you two must have spent a lot of time on your bed, hehehe," she chuckled.

"…"

"One more thing."

“Yes?” I asked.

“This spell wasn’t actually used on the bed itself because like I mentioned earlier, it’s a spell that was cast by using a catalyst. Hm, could you turn the mattress over? If not there, I’m sure there’s a space somewhere…” she said.

“Sure, I can do that,” I said.

If what she said was true, then it meant that there was a device on this bed that maintained the spell. It only took me a moment to search the mattress. I saw something white lodged inside the mattress.

‘A tooth?’

“I knew it… I was right. Is this your tooth, Mr. Ki-Young?” she asked.

“Yes, it most likely is,” I answered.

“Would it be easier to understand if I told you that the information contained in that tooth is what’s maintaining the magic for you?” she asked.

“Of course. It’s… similar,” I said.

“Ah, you specialize in catalysts, right?” she asked.

“I wouldn’t say that I specialize in it,” I told her.

‘This method is definitely similar to alchemy.’

It couldn’t be seen as a simple spell. Even if it was just an artifact that personally maintained my condition, the spell wasn’t possible just by matching my mana wavelength. The spell was only able to activate because the overall information that the human named Lee Ki-Young had and the information that was contained in the tooth that was used as a catalyst matched. It was difficult to imagine the amount of effort Jung Ha-Yan had placed into trying to research this type of magic.

‘Huh… ’

Thinking about it more, this method was exactly the direction that I wanted to take in my growth. The idea of mixing different types of magic into a catalyst and using

one's genetic information applied not only to homunculus, and chimera but also to magic potion research. No matter which path I took, it was the best teaching material that I could take advantage of.

'This is amazing… '

Of course, the method wouldn't be the same because Jung Ha-Yan approached it as a mage, while I had to approach it as an alchemist. When it came to using a catalyst or genetically modified formulas, I was more knowledgeable about it. The method was the same, but it opened up completely new research topics and it was to the point that I thought that maybe Jung Ha-Yan had arranged all of this.

'This will work.'

It was definitely going to work because I wasn't going at it without any information. The results of numerous experiments and efforts were right in front of me. If I did this on my own and completely focused on the research, it could take years for my textbook to become close to perfect. It would be strange if I wasn't excited about it.

"Oh my, I guess you really are happy about it," Hwang Jung-Yeon commented.

"Oh… yes. I honestly feel… happy," I said.

"It's too early for you to start enjoying it. There's another surprising function hidden in this bed," she said.

"There's something else?" I asked.

"Yes. It's a spell called Reverse."

"Oh."

"There's a built-in debuff that reverses these buffs and of course the target…"

"…"

"…are people other than you, Mr. Ki-Young. It'll probably activate if the person gets near your bed or lies on your bed. Since the target's information and the catalyst doesn't match, it won't be very effective, but even a low-level curse is still considered a curse. I could've been in danger if I sat down on it. If the spell that's been used on

this bed had been studied for about 10 years and was then developed before being used here… the moment you and another woman lay down on this bed, a high-level curse would be cast, causing her immediate death," she explained.

"So that's why you asked me to lift the bed," I said.

"That's right and it's a cute message from Miss Ha-Yan to not let another woman lie on your bed. How romantic," she commented.

It wasn't romantic at all. It was actually a bit scary.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"No, that was all I found. If you decide to officially start researching, the result may change, but besides the information that I told you, I can assure you that I have very little knowledge about magic, but I'm somewhat of a confident mage," she said.

"Thank you," I said.

It was in a random and strange time, but the result wasn't bad. Rather than being happy that Jung Ha-Yan arranged all of this for me, I was happy that a new growth path opened up for me. Of course, I had to quickly research this, but right now, growth was more important.

Currently, my room seemed to have become a dungeon or ruins that was filled with unspeakable secrets. In addition to the spell that was used on my body, my very own bed had also become the best research subject. I felt a bit happy that I would be able to do research in the comfort of my own room. This could be an inappropriate example, but the gift that Jung Ha-Yan gave me was no different from giving me a cup of water to drink while I was incredibly thirsty. It probably wouldn't be that easy to drink since the cup was complicated and narrow, but if I was able to resolve that issue, all I had to do was drink.

I looked at my bed in joy; the tooth that was lodged into it seemed to look very lovely.

'A tooth?'

It was for a moment, but a question popped into my head.

"Excuse me,"

“Yes?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“If my current location is being sent to Ha-Yan, does that mean that she has something on her that’s a part of my body?” I asked.

“Yes.”

‘What the hell… ’

I knew for sure that she must have taken my tooth with her, but since the tooth was here. I found it difficult to imagine what body part of mine Jung Ha-Yan had right now. My hair was still on my head, and I couldn’t remember her taking my blood. No, there was no way that she would injure me to get some blood. There also wasn’t a part of me that had been severed, and I didn’t lose another tooth.

‘What did she take then?’

Monsters usually had a lot of parts that could be used as a catalyst. Their teeth, hair, their mana-filled blood, and even their eyeballs could be used as well. The heart was the most effective and even bones and internal organs were useful as well. The saliva of certain monsters and the fluid produced by male monsters were effective as well, but it was difficult for me to guess just what exactly did Jung Ha-Yan take from me. I thought of a few things that she had most likely taken with her, but imagining them alone was unpleasant.

‘There’s no way… right?’

I was curious as to what part of my body she took and was using as a catalyst, but of course, I didn’t know what it was. Still, it didn’t matter what it was, what was more important was the fact that it made me feel anxious.

‘It can’t be that… ’

CHAPTER 80
THIRD JOB (6)

Honestly, at this point, Jung Ha-Yan's criminal act and finding out what she took wasn't important. Of course I thought that things could worsen if I left it alone, then it would be best to make her stop. But since she was far away right now, there wasn't anything I could do. This was the result she showed despite the fact that she was still growing. If Jung Ha-Yan did become an archmage that could influence the continent just like Kim Hyun-Sung imagined, then things that I could never imagine could happen. The small peeping hole could expand into the entire wall and this bed may become an artifact that could put a strong curse on other people. Moreover, Jung Ha-Yan may even develop a brand-new eavesdropping or video recording spell.

'A spell that has to do with the mind?'

It could be a mind-control spell that could control my mind little by little or she may even use my tooth as a catalyst and create a powerful spell where I was the only one that was being seduced. To make things worse, she could even make herself invisible and follow me all the time. Of course, Jung Ha-Yan didn't like hurting me in any way and considering how she was maintaining her innocent supporter title, it was less likely that she would do something like that. However, after recalling how she severed Park Hye-Young's limbs, I was starting to become convinced of the 'less likely to happen' situation.

If I wasn't careful…

'I could get fucked.'

The moment I act out of place, she might just take me out. I had to be careful regardless of whether Jung Ha-Yan was here or not. Even though Hwang Jung-Yeon was a talented mage, there could still be some kind of active device that she hadn't noticed.

I did have insurance, but I had no other choice but to act carefully.

Now was the time for me to focus on one thing.

“You’re amazing,” Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“I never thought that you would use the entire second floor as a workshop,” she answered.

“*Ohhh.*”

I also thought that the huge space was kind of cool and as a mage, I was sure that this space felt like a dream to her. While the other guild members were gone, I connected my room to the alchemy workshop, so there was even more space for me to do my work. Rather than being surprised about how I was using the floor as a laboratory, the latest equipment must have been the ones that caught her attention.

‘Since I benefited a lot from the Black Swan Guild too.’

I could understand why she looked so mesmerized. After all, even though she was an experienced adventurer, there should still be a lot of equipment in this place that was worthy of her astonishment.

“I just connected my workshop and my room. Walking back and forth was a bit uncomfortable… the best textbooks to study were already here, so there’s no need for me to waste time,” I explained.

“No, I’m talking about the equipment you have out here because they’re amazing,” she explained.

“I received all of them as gifts… by the way, does the second party have nothing else to do?” I asked.

“We’re taking a break right now. Am I getting in your way?” she asked.

“That’s not it. I’m just thankful that you helped me with all sorts of things,” I answered.

“Well, I was free anyway… and as a mage, I was curious as well. But that doesn’t mean I’m going to write a thesis about Miss Ha-Yan’s magic or your alchemy results to try and get additional benefits,” Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

“Yes, I know,” I told her.

When I used Mind’s Eye to look at her stats, I noticed a variety of information.

I saw it once before, but I wanted to remember the details.

[Checking Player Hwang Jung-Yeon’s Status Window and Stats.]

[Name - Hwang Jung-Yeon]

[Title - Soap Opera Lover]

[Age - 34]

[Nature - Boisterous Optimist]

[Job - Magic Scholar - Epic Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic demonic magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate black magic knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 30/Above rare growth limit]

[Agility - 40/Above rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 32/Below rare growth limit]

[Intelligence - 90/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 32/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 54/Above rare growth limit]

[Magic - 80/Below epic growth limit]

[Attribute - Sensitive Body - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - Initial Memory - Rare Rank]

[Overall Review - Player Hwang Jung-Yeon's magic growth has almost stopped. It's not an exaggeration to say that her path to becoming a high-ranking mage is pretty much over, but it seems like she's using her high Intelligence stat to hide her weakness. I guess you can consider this as a case where she was able to rise up to a high-ranking position because her attributes and job were matching. If her magic stat was above epic instead of below epic, the situation would have been different. You can say that she's similar to you, but don't think of her as your comrade. Unlike her who's in a bit of an unfortunate situation, your magic stat is pretty much useless.]

'Bastard.'

I definitely didn't like the overall review, but I really liked her stats and growth. There was no point in comparing myself to her, but she was a mage that relied on her intelligence more than her magic stats. When she saw that her magic stat was growing ever so slightly, she must have thought of different ways to carve out her own path.

On top of the spells that Jung Ha-Yan used, Hwang Jung-Yeon was also akin to that of a large textbook.

'Her attributes are okay too.'

Even though her sensitive body caught my attention, it didn't have any sexual meaning. She was the type to receive a lot of influence from magic and the atmosphere around her, but her initial memory attribute caught my attention the most.

[Attribute - Initial Memory - Rare Rank]

[Provides near-perfect initial memory.]

Since it was rare, it must be imperfect, but under the circumstance that the rank could be increased, then that ability could be more effective than my Mind's Eye skill.

'For example, having a perfect memory… '

It wasn't impossible at all.

When I slightly turned my head, I heard her voice. "Do you mind if I read it?"

"Which one?" I asked.

"The books that you have organized," she answered.

"Of course. I actually wanted to get your opinion," I said.

"Nonsense, it wasn't even actual advice. All I told you was nothing more than my personal opinion. You're the actual expert in this field. I'm unfamiliar with this knowledge… so it's a difficult topic for me as well," she said.

"Even with the knowledge of a high-ranking mage?" I asked.

"Yes."

"*Hm*…"

"Oh, now that I think about it. Mr. Ki-Young, it seems like you don't know the details about intelligence since you're busy researching the stats," she said.

"Yes, that's right," I told her.

"*Hm,* do you have any questions about the intelligence stat?" Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

Of course, I had questions.

“Yes. Unlike strength, stamina, and magic which can be measured with numbers. Luck and intelligence stats are difficult to measure. Even though my intelligence stat is increasing, it’s difficult to feel what exactly has changed. I’m certain that my understanding of alchemy has increased, but…” I explained.

“You already know a lot,” she commented.

“But other than that, it’s difficult to tell which part of me changed,” I told her.

“I’m not sure either, but I’m sure what you’re thinking is correct, Mr. Ki-Young. You don’t become a genius just because your intelligence increases. This means that there’s no significant change in your basic way of thinking since the knowledge you never possessed won’t suddenly appear,” she explained.

“It’s unclear as to why the stat even exists. Does that apply to people whose intelligence stats are in the 70s and 80s?” I asked.

“Yes and to be blunt, it’s possible that a person whose intelligence stat is in the 90s may not even know the multiplication table,” she answered.

“That’s a bit too harsh,” I commented.

“Yes, it’s a very rare situation, but it just means that the intelligence stat has nothing to do with the knowledge that the person possesses,” she explained.

“Are you saying that the magic that a job has or the increase in my knowledge about alchemy is all there is to it?” I asked her.

If that really were the case, then it simply meant that my stats were weak. Of course, they weren’t completely useless, but when comparing it to my other stats, I could only sigh.

“Of course, that’s not the only thing,” she answered.

“*Hm.*”

“Even though it doesn’t involve the intelligence that an individual has, I’m sure it helps in some way. When the stat goes over 80, you can definitely feel its influence a

little bit," she said.

I could feel what she was about to say.

"Most people whose intelligence stats are over 90 tend to develop one side of their brain. The mages around me and the talented people in Lindel whose intelligence stats are over 90 tend to have abilities that are considered extraordinary. There are people who tend to become calculative and there are others whose thinking skills become advanced," Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

"*Sigh.*"

"There are also people whose creativity or understanding skills have become noticeably different. For me, my memory has improved so much that it can't be compared to before," she said.

"I see," I nodded.

"Since I was young, I did hear from others that I had a good memory, but the moment my intelligence reached 90, I felt like my brain improved so much that I just couldn't understand it. Of course, there weren't any big changes in my other stats. It's nothing more than a simple assumption among us, but we believe that the effect maximizes the efficiency of the developed part of the brain," she said.

"That's… a very interesting theory," I commented.

"Right? Out of the attributes that I possess, I obtained the initial memory attribute the moment my intelligence went over 90 and the others experienced something similar. I think you'll obtain something like that as well, Mr. Ki-Young. Since you're skilled in romance, you may develop skills in romance… hehehe," she said, jokingly.

"I'd rather not have that," I told her.

As someone that felt hopeless, it was very good news. I thought that there was something behind the intelligence stat, but I never thought that it had the ability to affect the developed part of the brain. If what Hwang Jung-Yeon said was right, I was capable of reaching 90 points for my intelligence stat which meant that one part of my brain would be developed.

'I wonder what it'll be.'

I was sure that it would be different for everyone since Hwang Jung-Yeon obtained the initial memory attribute the moment her intelligence went over 90 and after hearing that she had a good memory.

I tried to recall what people told me since I was young, but I eventually had to shake my head.

'He's really good at playing petty tricks.'

'Huh, you're pretty fierce for a kid.'

These were the things I heard. I wasn't sure if having the ability to play petty tricks would be part of my growth, but if I obtained something similar to that after going over 90, then I would be disappointed. Considering the future, it would be best to test out the different possibilities, no, that could actually be better.

If I obtained a developed attribute for romance just like Hwang Jung-Yeon joked about, that would be the worst.

'How in the world would I use that?'

"Do talented players with intelligence stat over 90 all receive an attribute?" I asked.

"That's not the case, but excluding the attribute that the person possesses, it's no different from obtaining another one. It's just not explained in the system," she answered.

"Thank you for all the information," I said.

"It's nothing. You were going to find out about them eventually, so knowing about it this early won't change anything. But I do want to mention that people with high intelligence would find it hard to comprehend a knowledge they're unfamiliar with. Hehehe. More than that, I feel like we've made some progress," she said.

"I'm just taking baby steps. Even though the purpose isn't to understand magic itself, I can't help but keep thinking about it," I told her.

"Since you have already started, consider it half-done. If there's anything else I can help you with, please let me know," she offered.

“I won’t decline then,” I responded.

There was no reason for me to decline, but I knew better than anyone that people were kind for a reason.

“I can’t consider this as returning the favor, but if there’s anything I can help you with, please let me know anytime,” I returned her words back to her.

“Well, I didn’t offer because I wanted something in return…” she tried to explain.

“You don’t have to decline,” I said.

“I-In that case…”

“Okay!”

Hwang Jung-Yeon immediately accepted.

‘As expected.’

Even though we were part of the same guild, she explained so many things and helped me a lot for it to be considered a simple kindness. The setup began as if we met by chance, but she did have some kind of goal from the start. When I felt that she was going to ask for a favor that I wouldn’t be able to help her with, I tapped on the table and that was when I heard Hwang Jung-Yeon’s voice.

“Well…”

“What is it?” I asked.

“After everything is over, can you introduce me to Park Deok-Gu?”

I guess I wasn’t imagining it when I felt like she would ask me for a favor that I wouldn’t be able to handle.

‘Was that guy really a love doctor?’

CHAPTER 81
THIRD JOB (7)

"…"

"I-I just want you to create an opportunity for me to meet him. I honestly wasn't expecting anything in return, but since you said I could ask…" Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

I was sure I wasn't imagining it when she looked like there was something she wanted. To be honest, I didn't really want to get involved in Hwang Jung-Yeon and Park Deok-Gu's love affair, but if I could get help just by saying one thing, then it would be considered very beneficial to me. Naturally, I wanted to listen to her reasoning, not because I was worried about Park Deok-Gu, but because I was simply curious.

"Since when…"

"I-I don't really have a reason, but… the image of Mr. Park Deok-Gu won't leave my head…" she said, stuttering.

Maybe it was because of the attribute she had?

"We met by chance at the cafeteria… and the way he looked at me indifferently… for some strange reason… it's stuck in my head…" she explained.

'Is he a homme fatale or something?'

I was a bit surprised by Park Deok-Gu's unexpected personality, wait, this woman said from the start that she liked cozy men with large frames, so I understood why she liked Park Deok-Gu, but I couldn't believe the fact that she fell for him just because of the way he looked at her.

Objectively speaking, Hwang Jung-Yeon was pretty and the calm demeanor she had made her give off the good wife and wise mother vibe. Her hair was tied to one side and was sitting on her shoulders. Her shy smile was also suitable for her appearance.

I wasn't belittling my precious Deok-Gu, but it was to the point that he seemed like he was a part of a different race. It only took him 10 seconds to make a woman whose intelligence stat was 90 to fall for him. Unlike me who wasted a few days trying to get Jung Ha-Yan to join me, the result was incomparable. I was a bit surprised, but naturally, I had to accept her request.

"It shouldn't be difficult for me to arrange something," I told her.

"Oh… if you could also tell him that I'm a good person… or that I'm trustworthy… and maybe that we would look good together… or just say good things in any way…" she requested.

"…"

"I'll do my best to help you and I'll make sure that I don't get in the way of your research," she added.

"Okay, I'll do that as well, but you're going to have a lot of work," I warned her.

"Thank you."

I obtained a very competent assistant by simply promising that I would say a few words to Park Deok-Gu. It didn't really matter to me whether the two became a couple or not, but I thought that there was a good chance of that happening. If I gave enough compliments about this woman, then she would start off with an advantage since Park Deok-Gu had his full trust in me. As such, this strange deal made more sense.

Anyway, Hwang Jung-Yeon wouldn't influence me in a bad way, and her presence would actually be better since I would be able to fully focus on my research.

"Let's get started, Doctor Lee," she said.

"Sounds good, Assistant Hwang," I replied.

I was able to start a full-scale research with the assistant that I expectedly obtained.

After some time…

“Have you found anything?” she asked.

“Nothing yet, but it’s not like I don’t see anything at all,” I answered.

The purpose of this research was to re-establish the results of Jung Ha-Yan’s research. I wasn’t trying to create a new theory or do something revolutionary because the most important thing was increasing my stats and changing my job.

I was able to increase my stats pretty easily in the beginning, but as time passed, the growth became slow. Just like before, the effectiveness of using catalysts to increase my stats started to decrease.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Rather than focusing on specific knowledge, what you saw before was all of it. Like I mentioned before, my main research is whether I can compress the magic that’s contained inside a catalyst and maintain it and if there’s a way I can utilize genetic information along with it. That’s all,” I explained.

“*Ohhh*.”

“I guess it’s best for me to say that I’m starting to see the spell’s composition and design although the information isn’t all that useful to me. I can see why you called Ha-Yan a genius,” I added.

During the time when I couldn’t understand things, I thought that Hwang Jung-Yeon’s words didn’t make any sense, but I was starting to understand it little by little. I started to understand why she called Jung Ha-Yan a genius, why the spells she used on me were worthy enough to write a thesis about, and why she could create an entirely new school of magic with the spell that she had stored inside a catalyst.

‘It’s unique.’

The way she arranged her spells, the order, and the methods in which she stacked her mana were very refined. Unlike Hwang Jung-Yeon’s intelligence that developed her memory, Jung Ha-Yan’s intelligence must have developed her magic. Even now, her magic must still be developing. I was able to feel that just by looking closely at the completed spell.

‘Brilliant.’

I was able to realize once again why Kim Hyun-Sung was so obsessed with Jung Ha-Yan.

I continued my research. If I got stuck on something, sleepless days became more frequent and I skipped meals more often. It was also the same for my assistant Hwang Jung-Yeon. Honestly, there wasn't much that she had to do, but her presence was more than enough when it came to explaining magical things that I found difficult to comprehend.

~

[Intelligence will increase by 1.]

[Intelligence will increase by 1.]

~

It was only a little bit, but hearing the alarm that told me about my slowly increasing intelligence sounded nice. When my intelligence stat reached the 50s, I somewhat understood the mechanism for increasing my intelligence. First, I had to acquire or comprehend new knowledge. The next part involved deep thinking. I imagined it in my head, tested it, re-developed the theory, and read books. All these helped in increasing my intelligence.

Just like how Park Deok-Gu did weight training to increase his strength, I started nourishing myself to fatten my brain.

"I'll start cleaning the room, Mr. Ki-Young," Hwang Jung-Yeon offered.

"I appreciate it. Please don't clean up the area near me since I still have some documents I haven't organized yet," I told her.

"Of course. More than that, how about getting some sleep?" she suggested.

"No, it'll interrupt my flow," I responded.

My room had become really messy. The stack of documents and theories that I had been organizing kept on getting higher and higher. It reached the point that there was barely any room for us to move in. With the bed as the center, seeing all the documents lined up was an exciting sight, but studying wasn't fun at all.

'It's boring.'

It was definitely boring. No matter how much I studied, I felt like I wasn't getting anywhere. As such, my stress levels were high. But of course, I had no choice but to bear with it because the party members that were out with Kim Hyun-Sung right now must be growing as well. I would be kicked out if I didn't fulfill my goal. I didn't mean that Kim Hyun-Sung was going to kick me out, but if I couldn't keep up with the party, then they would naturally exclude me in future expeditions.

I honestly didn't want to be reduced to a mere potion-making machine, so I had no choice but to force myself.

"Excuse me, Mr. Ki-Young. How are you using a magic circle for your spells?" Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

"Well, every person has different ways of casting a spell, but I often cast spells by creating a tower. For Ha-Yan, it seemed like she designed hers to resemble a clock that's rotating with precision… it's like she took out all the parts and placed them in one place…" I said, describing it to her.

"I understand what you're saying," she said.

"It's more complicated than interpreting my magic. I don't know about everything else, but matching the genetic information was probably the most difficult," I told her.

"Interpreting a spell is already difficult enough… I'm sure it's even more stressful trying to turn a complete spell into a magic circle," she said.

"Yes, but it's a pretty simple task… and all I need is time," I responded.

All I did was draw a magic circle, but there was definitely a difference. It wasn't like there weren't any results at all, but I did feel impatient.

Just like that, one month passed. Luckily, Kim Hyun-Sung's party still hadn't returned.

'I'm sure they're suffering.'

I was certain of it.

The consumables they took were either useless or weren't enough and the atmosphere of the party was a mess. Jung Ha-Yan probably cried every night and I was sure that Kim Ye-Ri was probably shooting the wrong arrows since Kim Hyun-Sung wouldn't tell her what to do. It was also possible that Park Deok-Gu returned to being the coward he was before and although Sun Hee-Young was probably the only normal one, leading a party had never been her strong suit, so I was sure that the party felt like they were lost.

More time passed. Actually, it was only a little bit. At this point, I understood the majority of Jung Ha-Yan's magic and my intelligence stat was already close to 60. Personally, it was a result that I could only be satisfied with.

"Looks like there are results," Hwang Jung-Yeon said

"Since my actual intelligence stat increased, there has to be a result. In fact, I'm close to reaching my goal," I told her.

"Oh, congratulations! How about resting today?" she suggested.

"No, I think it'll be best to finish up first and then rest," I replied.

I couldn't rest knowing that I wasn't the only one fighting. I was able to ask myself more basic questions when I started living without distinguishing between night and day. It wasn't a question about the truth that was hidden inside the magic. It was a question regarding my goal, which was my growth.

How was Jung Ha-Yan able to move on to the next step without gaining experience? I already knew the answer.

'Because of her comprehension.'

Despite the fact that Jung Ha-Yan never hunted once, she obtained a job. Even though I didn't ask her exactly how she obtained it, it was probably because she must have realized what magic was. She was able to understand and put it into practice. Basically, she comprehended a small truth and it was the same for me.

'It needs to be understood.'

Besides interpreting, depicting, and organizing the documents, I had to understand everything that was in my head. This was the right path.

After that, I could remember constantly asking myself questions.

I started becoming obsessed with asking ‘Why?’ instead of ‘How come?’

I was interested in the truth that I couldn’t see more than the results I was able to see. I would imagine, put it into practice and try to find the reason why I failed. Fortunately, testing had never been difficult because I had a very competent assistant.

“You’ve lost some weight.”

“But I don’t feel all that bad.”

There wasn’t anything grand like reaching the truth or taking a layer off.

All I cared about was the ‘why’ and I didn’t want a grand answer. I was satisfied with a small piece. Like how to change genetic traits, information values, how magic influenced an individual, and whether the individual that was changed through magic was complete or incomplete. Regarding the twisted DNA we were familiar with, there had been continuous research regarding which virus was lethal to which monsters and why this DNA couldn’t accept the virus. Out of the magic circle, magic, genetics, information, and the small fragments, I didn’t really understand any of it, but there was one thing I was certain of—the fact that I was growing.

“What do you need?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“Please hand me the catalysts that I brought from the Garden of Horror,” I answered.

There wasn’t anything amazing. I wasn’t good at studying and I wasn’t smart either. I wasn’t a scientist and I had no knowledge about genetics, but at this point, I was enjoying the process of finding the answer.

“You look like you’re having fun,” she commented.

“That’s not true,” I shrugged.

[Intelligence will increase by 1.]

“I know you’re having fun. I was like that too,” she said.

“No, I’m actually bored,” I responded.

[Intelligence will increase by 1.]

“Lies,” she commented.

[Intelligence will increase by 1.]

The moment I grabbed the small fragments that I couldn’t see with my own eyes, I was able to grow just a little bit more.

[You’ve discovered a new job.]

With the result, I can be satisfied with.

“Haha.”

CHAPTER 82
THIRD JOB (8)

I slowly opened my eyes because it was really loud. After selecting my job yesterday, the last thing I remembered was doing various tests and falling asleep on the spot. My mind went blank as if it had been a while since I'd woken up.

'How long have I been asleep for?'

I barely slept when I was near the end of my research and since I haven't cleaned up yet, I had no choice but to sleep in the alchemy workshop instead of my room.

'I'm tired.'

If I knew I was going to be this tired, it would have been better if I cleaned up and slept in my room. After all, Jung Ha-Yan's gift had a special effect that relieved my fatigue. When I turned my head, I noticed Hwang Jung-Yeon lying on the sofa.

'I'm sure she's tired too.'

She tried hard to keep up with my research, so after I was done, she immediately fell asleep. The way she was lying down did make her seem like she wasn't being careful, but I didn't have any strange thoughts because it was proof that she was no longer wary of me. This made me happier since the more trustworthy people there were, the better it would be for me. All of a sudden, I heard a voice that woke me up again.

"Wow… I guess our hyung-nim has been tired. The entire second floor is a mess. Hey, noonim! You'll fall if you run. Hee-Young noonim, say something to her," Park Deok-Gu said.

"…"

"Let's clean up for now. Miss Hee-Young, Miss Ha-Yan…" Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Okay, okay."

I knew what he was going to say.

The party members that went out on the expedition had finally returned. The smile that I had only lasted for a moment. When I saw Hwang Jung-Yeon sprawled out on the sofa, I started spacing out.

'That's not good.'

I heard someone walking up the stairs. Their steps were fast and it was obvious who it was.

'Jung Ha-Yan.'

Even though there wasn't any physical contact, I was sure that she wasn't happy about the fact that I was alone in a room with a woman. In addition, Hwang Jung-Yeon would also be unhappy about her fateful reunion with Park Deok-Gu.

"Oppa… oppa…"

I guess Jung Ha-Yan thought I would be in my alchemy workshop because I immediately heard her knocking on the door. No, since she used a tracking spell on me, she certainly knew I was here. Because she kept knocking on the door, I felt like I was the main character of a horror movie.

Rattle!

"Oppa… are you in there? Are you there?" she asked.

Rattle!

"You're in there, right? Oppa?" she asked again.

Rattle!

"Hey, maybe he's sleeping. It seems like he has been researching all night… I think it'll be best to stay quiet so that he can sleep comfortably, noonim. It's still early in the morning after all…" Park Deok-Gu suggested.

'Nice one, Park Deok-Gu!'

“Or maybe something happened to him… maybe he passed out?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

‘That dumb pig!’

Knock, knock.

I kept hearing them knocking on the door and for some reason, I felt like I was being made fun of. Naturally, Hwang Jung-Yeon would wake up because of the sudden loud noises. After slowly rubbing her eyes, it didn’t take her long to realize what was going on. When I saw her looking at me with widened eyes, I couldn’t help but feel a bit more flustered.

“Hyung-nim! Are you sleeping?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

It was a question that ignored common sense because if I was sleeping, I wouldn’t be able to answer it. But if I could answer that I was sleeping and it made sense, then I would have done it.

“Do you think something happened?” he asked.

‘What kind of bullshit is he saying?’

When I signaled her toward the window, Hwang Jung-Yeon nodded desperately.

“Oh, Deok-Gu. I fell asleep and woke up just now,” I said.

“Oppa…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“So you were sleeping.”

“You came later than expected. I’ll open the door, so hold on,” I told them.

I saw Hwang Jung-Yeon quickly making her way toward the second-floor window. Actually, it wouldn’t be bad to tell them that we had been doing research together from the start, but I wanted to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. The fact that a man and a woman were together until morning would surely cross Jung Ha-Yan’s limit.

“*Kyah!*”

Hwang Jung-Yeon let out a short scream as she jumped down from the second floor.

The door rattled again.

Rattle, rattle, rattle.

Jung Ha-Yan was desperately shaking the door because she felt that something was off. After looking around the room to see if there were any other traces, I slightly opened the door and saw the faces I haven't seen for a long time.

I first saw Park Deok-Gu. I was always happy to see him and his innocent smile. I wasn't sure why, but his eyes were red. When I saw the injuries all over his body, I couldn't help but think that the expedition hadn't been easy.

Of course, I was happy to see Jung Ha-Yan as well. She looked around the workshop to find the answer to the scream she heard earlier, but I felt her eyes on me. It only took a moment for her eyes to become filled with tears. Her tears started falling within a few seconds after that, which made her crying feel a bit unrealistic for some reason. Still, I knew that there was no other reason why she was like this. She simply missed me to the point of crying.

I also feel somewhat the same as her since seeing Jung Ha-Yan after so long honestly made me feel better.

"*Hiccuuuup*… oppa…" she said.

What followed was a strange cry. It was kind of cute, so I lightly patted her head without realizing it.

"*Hiccuuup*… oppa…" she said again.

"Was it hard?" I asked.

"*Hiccuup…*"

I saw her shaking her head intensely. She was trying to wipe off her tears using her hand, but it wasn't really helping. When I slightly opened my arms, Jung Ha-Yan immediately ran into them and started burying her face into my chest.

"I missed you," she said.

“I missed you too, Ha-Yan,” I said.

It was only half true.

When I looked ahead while patting her head, I saw Sun Hee-Young greeting me and Kim Hyun-Sung looking toward us. It would probably be difficult to get Jung Ha-Yan off of me for the time being, so all I could do was wave while holding her. The mood that they gave off made me think that although it wasn’t perfect, everyone managed to find an answer in their own ways.

‘The expedition was a success.’

I was sure of it.

“It’s been a while, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“It really has been a while, Mr. Hyun-Sung. How was the expedition?” I asked.

“I wasn’t really satisfied, but we did see results. Even though Ye-Ri only changed her job twice, Miss Hee-Young, Mr. Deok-Gu, and Miss Ha-Yan all managed to change their jobs and their stats increased significantly as well,” he answered.

“That’s a relief,” I commented.

It must have been difficult because Kim Hyun-Sung definitely became nothing more than a day-care teacher in the expedition. The fact that Kim Hyun-Sung’s face became thinner during the one-month excursion made me sure that it had been the case.

“How was it for you, Mr. Ki-Young?” he asked.

“It was the same for me as well. I raised my stats and obtained a new job,” I answered.

“What did you get this time?” he asked.

“Did you get a third job too, hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yeah, I did. I’ll explain the details downstairs,” I replied.

"Ohhh…"

"Honestly, I find it difficult to describe this job that I obtained. But I think it'll be better if I just show it to you," I told them.

"Is it the alchemist's high-rank job?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Yes. According to the status window, it's a newly discovered job," I answered.

"Are you saying it's a job that didn't exist before?" he asked.

"That's what it seems like," I told him.

"That's… a bit surprising," he commented.

"Thanks to that, I had no other choice. If a few jobs popped up at the same time, then I would've waited until you returned, but… I had no other choice. But I don't regret it," I explained.

"Now, I'm even more curious," he said.

I was able to see Jung Ha-Yan's expression because she was still stuck to me and Park Deok-Gu looked really curious as well.

"Man, I should've been there during the glorious moment… I'm a bit sad that I wasn't there with you to help you pick your job," Park Deok-Gu said disappointingly.

"I'm sure you'll like it too," I told him.

"Seriously?"

I didn't know what Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking, but I was certain that Park Deok-Gu was going to like it because it looked a bit flashy and marvelous on the outside.

"You're really amazing; you were able to obtain a job on your own," Kim Hyun-Sung praised.

"It was nothing. By the way, Miss Hee-Young, your…"

"Yes, this is my fourth job," she said, interrupting me.

“I see.”

The mood of the party was a bit fun. They definitely looked awkward before the expedition, but right now, they all seemed close. It felt like the new members were able to get along with the existing members pretty well. Both Park Deok-Gu and the kid, Kim Ye-Ri looked like they were trying to read Sun Hee-Young’s reaction and it didn’t take me long to realize why they were doing that.

‘Hm.’

I guess she was chosen as the best alternative after me and Kim Hyun-Sung. As the person that had the highest specs, relying on her little by little must have created this result.

‘Not bad.’

Even though she thought that beating up lazy and useless people in society was a new way of doing volunteer work, she was undoubtedly competent and sensible. She was a bit different from Jung Ha-Yan, but she did give off a slightly frightening vibe and these strengths of her probably contributed to making her the best alternative.

I honestly was hoping that Park Deok-Gu would be a bit more proactive, but…

‘Maybe he’s not that skilled yet.’

For some reason, he seemed like he was slightly discouraged.

Because it had been a while since the party members have gathered, the party was in a good mood. They asked me about my job while we were on our way to the practice room, and all I gave them were vague answers or a nod. It felt like I was doing a demonstration.

When we still weren’t members of a guild, the demonstration we showed to the influential figures of the other guilds couldn’t be considered a demonstration. After all, the goal of it was to show my strengths, and show what kind of a person I was by utilizing my attributes. But this time was different. I naturally wanted people to recognize my worth. I had to make the regressor and the party acknowledge the fact that I was even more valuable than I am now.

“I hope I make a good impression. My firepower isn’t all that bad, but I still don’t

know whether it's effective or not…" I said.

"I understand." Kim Hyun-Sung nodded.

"Ha-Yan, could you let go of me for a moment?" I asked.

"Oh… okay, oppa," she replied.

I recited my spell. When I started to pour my mana into the catalyst that had been prepared beforehand, I immediately received a reaction. Based on my standards, it wasn't a large amount of mana. As such, I only had to use this much.

I prepared two things. A catalyst with a magic circle that contained various spells, and a catalyst that would receive the spell. I needed materials that had the same information and ones that could interact with each other. A quality material that could withstand the magic circle that had been compressed and folded over a few times was also very important, but the information was much more important than that. For example…

'The tooth that Jung Ha-Yan used a spell on and me being the target that'll receive the spell.'

I did lose my concentration for a bit, but I didn't have any difficulties completing the spell. I slowly recited the spell.

'Growth Acceleration.'

This spell could be considered simple.

The small cells of the monster that was receiving the spell suddenly started to expand. The way the small cells started transforming into flesh was a bit grotesque, but it was effective.

Craaaack, crack, craaaack!

All of a sudden, sounds that the party couldn't understand started to reverberate. It sounded like bones being cracked, but it also sounded like the cells were exploding. The sounds were familiar to me, but I guess it was loud for Kim Ye-Ri because she covered her ears. I thought that the large flesh was going to explode if this continued, but it was starting to transform into my desired form. A monster's hand suddenly

popped out from it.

Craaaaack!

Before the monster could roar, all the party members looked at me as if they were demanding an explanation.

“Hyu… hyung-hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu stuttered.

“How… did you manage to do this?” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Even Kim Hyun-Sung was looking at me the same way.

I felt an unknown pleasure running down my back.

“It’s my job’s attribute,” I answered.

CHAPTER 83
THIRD JOB (9)

Before the monster could roar, everyone looked at me as if they were demanding an explanation.

“Hyu… hyung-hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“How… did you manage to do this?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

Even Kim Hyun-Sung was looking at me the same way.

“It’s my job’s attribute,” I answered.

“Oh…”

They looked as if they wanted a more detailed explanation. Fortunately, the anxiety they were feeling didn’t last long.

“This is the result of a biological experiment involving catalysts with the same genetic information,” I explained.

“Uh, I-I don’t understand what you’re saying…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Could you dumb it down for us?” Kim Hyun-Sung requested.

“Sure. Think of it as a remote that has different spells compressed inside it and a television that reacts to the remote. The object that’s in my hand is the remote and the arm of that large monster that’s growing is the television. As long as I have catalysts that can react to each other, it’s not a difficult thing to do, but the process of preparing for this is a bit difficult,” I explained.

“But still…”

They all looked as if they were surprised once again and it was natural for them to react that way. When I first saw the result, not only was I surprised, but I even

panicked. When I looked at my information again, I felt proud because I couldn't believe the fact that I was the one that created this result.

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Title - Mercenary Queen's Lover]

[Age - 25]

[Nature - Cautious Strategist]

[Job - Bio Alchemy Summoner - Unique Epic Rank]

[This is a new job that remained undiscovered up until now. Even on the continent that boasts a long history, this type of alchemy method has never been seen. If every alchemist saw your results, you'll be praised with much rhetoric. Because of the influence of your remarkable achievements, your rank will be upgraded to Unique Epic Rank. Your intelligence will increase by four points and your magic will increase by three points. The result of the bio alchemy that was created will determine the summons. You will acquire weak control over your summons.]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic alchemy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate alchemy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired special summoning knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 20/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 21/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 25/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 64/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 20/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 45/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 15/Below average growth limit]

[Gear]

[Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy - Epic Rank - Alchemist Only]

[Magic Shield Ring - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - Mind's Eye]

[Overall Review - I recognize your efforts in trying to avoid being in the worst situation, but it's not good to struggle so much. No matter how hard you try, it won't change the fact that you're still in the worst situation. Apart from that, I commend you for your efforts. Struggle all you want until you reach your limits.]

My overall stats had increased a lot and I even obtained special summoning knowledge as a job effect. Actually, describing it as obtained was strange since it was knowledge that I created through the theory that I established.

Since everyone looked curious, I couldn't help but talk with a small smile on my face.

"The name of the job is Bio Alchemy Summoner and the rank is unique epic rank," I told them.

"*Ohhh…*"

"It's a unique epic rank?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yeah.”

For some reason, Park Deok-Gu seemed discouraged and after checking his information, I was able to realize why he was making that face.

‘Rare?’

I noticed that everyone obtained a rare-ranked job except for Park Deok-Gu. Usually, people obtained rare-ranked jobs during their fourth or fifth jobs, but Kim Ye-Ri obtained it on her second job, which meant that she was growing extremely fast. Park Deok-Gu probably felt inferior because of this, but I could help him take care of his mental health later because answering the party members’ questions was more important right now.

“Unique epic rank… that’s amazing, Mr. Ki-Young.”

“I’ve heard about the rare, epic, and legendary ranks, but this is my first time hearing about a different set of ranks.”

“It probably means that you’re the only person that can obtain that job. There are a few adventurers within the city that have unique-rank jobs. Just like you, they obtained a unique ranked job after they discovered something new, but… when other adventurers tried the same thing, they didn’t obtain the same job despite having the same results.”

“I see.”

“Basically, it’s a job that can’t be mass-produced.”

‘That’s great.’

Being unique was an advantage. An advantage that would increase my worth by an enormous amount.

When I glanced at Kim Hyun-Sung, I noticed him talking as if he was kind of excited. While walking around the city, I used Mind’s Eye and checked other people’s information, but I have never seen anyone with a unique epic rank job. He might know something that I am unaware of, but if that wasn’t the case, then it meant that Kim Hyun-Sung was still currently unraveling some information about the future.

“Since it is focused on one specific field, there will definitely be a disadvantage, but I’m sure that there are enough advantages as well. I thought you were going to decide on taking the path that involves potions or the homunculus…” Kim Hyun-Sung commented.

“I did think about studying more about homunculus, but since my intelligence was low, I couldn’t really understand it. I thought it would be worth it to focus on the chimera, but I thought that trying to control the chimera would become problematic since I don’t possess any skills or magic that could maintain mind control,” I explained.

“Ah…”

“I considered the possibility of controlling part of the chimera instead of the entire thing, but I immediately found the answer. Oh, I’ll tell you after cleaning that up first,” I said.

When I recited the spell again, the arm of the monster that had expanded started to get smaller. This was the revised edition of Jung Ha-Yan’s reverse spell, which reversed the effect of every spell.

“What you saw just now wasn’t a summon. This thing that can’t be considered a living organism doesn’t have a will of its own, but… thankfully, after I obtained this job, the system determined that it was a summon,” I told him.

“I see.”

It looked amazing, but that didn’t mean there weren’t any disadvantages. First, the quality of the material was very important. The quality had to be good enough so that I could stuff it with a magic circle that held a variety of spells. It meant that items that couldn’t be used as goods had to be used as consumables. I also had to use catalysts that were rare-ranked or above.

The second was that it didn’t last long. Unlike summons that remained next to their owners, the summons made from bio alchemy couldn’t be maintained for a long time. In addition, its entire body wasn’t ductile. I wasn’t sure what was going to happen after this, but as of right now, summoning a part of it was my limit. Even though it was magic, its attack was determined by its physicality, which was a disadvantage.

Things could change if I found another monster's catalyst, but this was all I could figure out so far. Kim Hyun-Sung's thoughts were more important than my decision. With the new job that I obtained and my stats, determining whether it would help in future expeditions was the most important. When I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung as if I was asking him to give me an overall review, he nodded and spoke. "You did well."

"Oh."

"I knew you would do well, but the result is beyond my imagination," he added.

"Thank you, but I do need to look into it more…" I told him.

I felt good when he expressed his satisfaction. I had this same feeling when I first demonstrated my abilities. Everyone looked surprised. I felt even better when they congratulated me.

"I knew you could do it, hyung-nim. Yeah… you're amazing, hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Thanks, Deok-Gu."

"Congra…" Kim Ye-Ri spoke quietly. This was my first time actually hearing her voice. I raised my hand to lightly pat her head, but she quickly hid behind Kim Hyun-Sung, so my arm was left hanging in the air. It was then that I slowly started to look around.

'…'

I saw Jung Ha-Yan's face and she looked anxious. But it didn't seemed like she looked anxious because I extended my hand out toward Kim Ye-Ri.

'Does she think that she's been caught?'

I guess she thought the alchemy's mechanism was very similar to the method she used when she used that spell because her face started to tremble. She must have been worried about me finding out her spells. Actually, I thought it would be best to have Jung Ha-Yan stop her actions, but it wasn't the right time, so I didn't say anything.

"Ha-Yan," I said.

“Yes, oppa.”

When I grabbed her hand tightly, she seemed like she calmed down. I realized that I made the right decision when I saw her guilty look.

‘I need to let her realize it on her own.’

Letting her realize that her actions were wrong was the best method. Since her nature hadn’t changed yet, as long as she could still feel remorse, I thought that it would make her refrain from taking such actions in the future.

“How about we discuss what we obtained while we eat, Mr. Ki-Young? Afterall, you should also know what we’ve gained.” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

‘I don’t really need to know… ’

Letting them explain it on their own was more comfortable for me.

“I guess you were satisfied with the expedition,” I commented.

“That’s not the case. At first, it was really difficult to the point that I thought about returning…” he answered.

“…”

“I would like to hear the details,” I said.

When Kim Hyun-Sung started talking, our surroundings became quiet. I wasn’t sure what kind of mess they got into, but based on the quiet atmosphere, I immediately realized that whatever happened must have been beyond my imagination.

“We entered a rare-ranked dungeon. After we entered the dungeon, it took us three days to start the expedition,” he said.

“What?” I asked.

“Miss Ha-Yan wasn’t feeling well…” he said.

“Oh.”

I saw Jung Ha-Yan lowering her head. Kim Hyun-Sung was trying to make it seem like it was nothing serious, but I had a feeling that I knew what happened. She didn't eat properly until the moment she left this place and since she stopped eating and drinking, her body must have been in a bad condition. She probably started crying and making a fuss while in the dungeon.

'So that's why they were late.'

The three days that Kim Hyun-Sung was talking about was probably the time it took to calm her mind.

"It also took Mr. Deok-Gu a long time to adapt. I saw other sides of him that I haven't seen before and it was the same for Ye-Ri. Even though she barely has any experience, her unexpected actions caused the party to become chaotic. If Miss Hee-Young wasn't there, it would've been even more difficult," he explained.

"…"

"…"

'He's talking as if he wanted her to hear him.'

"Their teamwork was also a mess. If I didn't get involved, we could've all died. There were many times where the rearguards were in danger because they shot an arrow toward the front which surprised the vanguards." he added.

"*Ugh…*"

"We were in a situation where it wouldn't have been strange if we got annihilated," he commented.

No, he wasn't saying it so that the others could hear him. He was telling me this to show me how much he suffered.

'…'

The scene was akin to that of a parent telling their spouse the bad things their child had done. As expected, Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan lowered their heads even more.

“But as we continued, they started to improve and the results weren’t that bad,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I see.”

“We also reached our goal of 60s in our stats and we succeeded in obtaining epic-ranked jobs as well,” he said.

“Ah…”

“I’ll tell you the details once we’re inside,” he told me.

‘All of it?’

It didn’t take me long to realize that Kim Hyun-Sung’s words sounded strange. I checked the rank of Park Deok-Gu’s job again, and it was definitely rare.

‘This pig… ’

CHAPTER 84
THIRD JOB (10)

I had an idea as to why Park Deok-Gu lied. While the party members were obtaining their new jobs, he probably asked Kim Hyun-Sung or Sun Hee-Young for consultation. There was a good chance that he found out from them that everyone else obtained an epic-ranked job. I didn't know how poorly he performed during the expedition, but he must have felt inferior especially when it came to Kim Ye-R. After all, the kid was considered a genius and that probably shocked him quite a bit.

'Her potential is legendary rank.'

It wasn't just limited to her abilities. I could discover the details if I increased the rank of Mind's Eye, but I already realized that Kim Ye-Ri had a lot of potential. When I remembered how well she did in the Garden of Horror last time, I was sure that she grew a lot during this expedition as well.

For Park Deok-Gu, he must have been forced to watch the geniuses at work. Geniuses were human beings in a whole new league. They were the type of people that could easily do something that would take decades for an ordinary person to do. Even though I was still young, I have seen many of those so-called geniuses.

'Not just on Earth… '

But here as well. Those people possessed abilities that were beyond the common sense of a normal human being and there were many of them here. Jung Ha-Yan could use high-level magic like it was nothing and she could also use magic that was beyond my comprehension. Even though it wasn't clearly visible yet, Sun Hee-Young's holy stats had a legendary potential level and with her unique composure, she was able to keep the party together. Kim Ye-Ri was the girl that Kim Hyun-Sung himself brought over from the slums. As for the regressor, being labeled a genius wouldn't be enough.

'…'

Honestly, this was a ridiculous lineup. Kim Hyun-Sung's party was a party where

each and every member could be called a genius based on their levels. Of course, Park Deok-Gu was a type of person that had the potential to climb to the higher ranks, but he must have felt all sorts of things during the expedition.

'A monster.'

Hwang Jung-Yeon even said that she was ashamed after seeing Jung Ha-Yan's result, but even still, the choice that Park Deok-Gu made was unexpected. When thinking about his personality, I assumed he lied without realizing it because he was cornered, but I was worried about his mental health more than his lie. He seemed a bit pitiful after I obtained the unique epic rank job. He probably felt that he was the only one that was falling behind in the party.

"The job I obtained this time is Archmage," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Really?" I asked.

"Yes. It increased my magic as well as my affinity level with all types of properties. Not only is elemental magic included, but… all other magic as well. Hehehe. I can use my magic more effectively now and I even acquired a high-rank magic knowledge, but I can't say that it's that amazing right now…" she explained

"That's great," I said.

"Also, my magic stat increased to 69, oppa!" she said excitedly.

"Our Ha-Yan is amazing. It increased a lot more than I thought," I told her.

"My intelligence is 62 as well," she added.

"Great!"

"According to Mr. Hyun-Sung, I should have no problem reaching the 70s. Just like how Hee-Young unnie's stats increased even though she doesn't go out and hunt all that much," she said.

'I'm sure that only applies to people like you.'

Mine and Park Deok-Gu's main stats were in the low 60s. I felt a bit embarrassed because the way she talked about how much she grew sounded as if she was asking

me to give her a reward for all the troubles she went through, but it was still worth nodding at her. Basically, the stronger she was, the safer I was. Of course, we could end up in the opposite situation, but her current growth direction was advantageous to me.

When I looked at Jung Ha-Yan, I saw some information about her job.

[Archmage - Epic Rank]

[This job is given to those who have met the requirement to explore the truth about magic. Magic will be increased by 5 and their affinity level for all types of magic will increase as well. There's nothing known about the jobs that the player can change to later.]

'Nice.'

I was able to confirm which direction she was going to take in her growth. The name sounded plain, but it fit Jung Ha-Yan pretty well. It was way better than changing into jobs like blood mage, mage of slaughter, or even mad mage.

Basically, Jung Ha-Yan was taking the standard route and that didn't just apply to Jung Ha-Yan. It was the same for Kim Hyun-Sung as well. I didn't know his growth path after this, but it seemed like Kim Hyun-Sung was avoiding the most standard form of a swordsman.

[High Ranking Swordsman Trainee - Epic Rank]

[This job is for those who are training in order to realize the extremes of swordsmanship. Strength will be increased by 3, agility by 2, and magic by 1.]

There wasn't a need for me to read any further. I already found the answer just by looking at the job he chose, which was epic ranked. Kim Hyun-Sung basically

considered that job's rank as another gate that he had to pass through. There wasn't a need for me to mention again just how important a job was in this world. If I was just an ordinary adventurer, then I would never had made a decision like him.

While the others were talking and shoving their food down their throats, I heard Kim Hyun-Sung's voice. "Ye-Ri obtained the tracker job."

"A tracker?" I asked.

"Yes."

"I think it's the best job for her since not only will she be able to use a bow, but she will also be able to wield daggers and medium-sized swords thanks to her decent overall stats. With her stats focused on agility and magic, her future job selection will also widen from now on," he explained.

'Since she doesn't have any stats that are below epic.'

"So she doesn't have to worry about which path she needs to take," I said.

"Yes, that's right. That had been the chronic issue of our party. Also, Miss Hee-Young chose Chancellor as her job… so her holy power increased a lot. Mr. Deok-Gu mentioned that he obtained a job that was related to his tanking abilities," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

When Kim Hyun-Sung said that, I surreptitiously looked over at Sun Hee-Young and immediately saw her job name.

[Dark Priest Chancellor - Epic Rank]

I guess she didn't explain the details to Kim Hyun-Sung because when I lightly nodded, she immediately nodded as well. This was like the evolved job of her previous dark priest job, so it didn't seem that bad, but I guess she didn't mention the fact she could also use offensive magic and not just holy magic.

Regardless, the party was growing very smoothly, and excluding the seemingly

embarrassed Park Deok-Gu, there weren't any issues for now. No, Park Deok-Gu wasn't actually an issue. His growth was also surprising, the growth of the people around him was simply extraordinary. I was certain that no matter where he went, Park Deok-Gu would always be welcomed by people thanks to his stats.

'I should talk to him about it… '

Of course, I had no desire to mention this in a place where all the party members were gathered. I didn't want the others to know that I had the ability to look at other people's stats. Moreover, provoking Park Deok-Gu's inferiority in a place like this wasn't the right thing to do.

'There's nothing dumber than comparing yourself to a genius.'

It sounded a bit harsh, but I wanted him to realize this because a certain level of acceptance would be more helpful for him.

The topic of the conversation was pretty serious, but it started lightening up. They were talking about the mistakes they made in the dungeon and I told them about how I stayed in my room during the time they were gone. When I heard that Jung Ha-Yan cried every day, I just nodded and when they told me that Kim Hyun-Sung saved the party when they were in trouble, I burst into laughter as if I had expected it. Kim Ye-Ri barely expressed her emotions as always, but she started smiling a little bit and her voice got slightly louder than before.

Just then, the door of the guild opened. It was the crazy gramp, Lee Seol-Ho, and the sub guild master, Lee Sang-Hee. I noticed how serious they looked when they entered the guild.

"We'll have a meeting right now. All the managers in the guild, please gather," Lee Sang-Hee announced.

"Everyone?"

"Yes, no exceptions. Everyone, please gather. We'll hold the meeting in my office. How many parties are here?" she asked.

"I think party two are the only ones."

"Party seven returned this morning, Miss Lee Sang-Hee, Mr. Lee Seol-Ho."

“Then please have Mr. Ki-Young and Mr. Hyun-Sung attend as well,” she said.

“But they’re…” Lee Seol-Ho said.

“No, everyone needs to gather. It’s about the guild,” she said, cutting off Lee Seol-Ho.

“Okay.”

‘What’s going on?’

It was obviously something serious. Lee Sang-Hee always had a tender look on her face, which reminded me of my mother, but her face looked really pale right now and even the crazy gramp looked worried. I had no idea what happened, but I expected it to be something serious since the senior officers of the guild wore similar expressions on their faces as well.

“Please head upstairs first. I’ll make sure to head there with everybody,” Lee Seol-Ho said.

“Okay, I’ll leave it to you, Mr. Seol-Ho,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“Okay.”

The normal guild members that weren’t part of a party quickly headed upstairs and were probably on their way to get Hwang Jung-Yeon since party two lived on the fourth floor.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Please head upstairs, Mr. Ki-Young,” Lee Sang-Hee responded.

“Oh… okay,” I said.

“Please.”

The fun atmosphere suddenly turned chaotic. I saw Lee Seol-Ho quietly signaling at me. I didn’t like the way he signaled with his finger, but I decided to listen first to see what was going on.

“The rest of you can spend time on your own until Mr. Ki-Young and I return. Actually,

it would probably be best if you all get as much rest as possible," Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

"Okay."

"G-Got it," Park Deok-Gu stuttered.

'What's going on?'

Various thoughts filled my head and my assumptions only got worse when I saw people suddenly grabbing their belongings. The murmurs of the normal guild members got louder and more of them started to arm up. I could hear a lot of voices, but I was sure that they had no idea what was going on.

"Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. The sub guild master is currently in the meeting…"

"Yes, we know. We'll head upstairs now," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Oh, I-I don't know…"

The guild's receptionist that delivered the message to us quickly lowered her head and ran outside the guild. When we quickly headed upstairs to Lee Sang-Hee's office, I saw an armed guard opening the door, making it easier for me and Kim Hyun-Sung to quickly enter.

"Is everyone here?" Lee Sang-Hee asked.

"Yes, it seems like it."

Lee Sang-Hee was sitting at the front. I saw Hwang Jung-Yeon, and the crazy gramp, with his three lackeys. Even the two executive officers whose faces were the only things I could recognize were here…

'Is this it? Seriously?'

As the guild that represented the free city of Lindel at one point, the number of executive officers that gathered here was far too little than I thought.

“Mr. Ki-Young, Mr. Hyun-Sung, please have a seat. I have some bad news,” she said.

We still had no idea what was going on. I felt discouraged when I saw the grim look on one of the executive officers, but Kim Hyun-Sung looked calm as if he had an idea.

‘Does he know?’

It didn’t take me long to deduce everything. When I recalled the reason why we joined the Blue Guild, I immediately found the answer.

‘He knows.’

Kim Hyun-Sung knew exactly why this was happening. After all, he purposely selected the Blue Guild despite many offers from the large guilds.

As the sub guild master, Lee Sang-Hee started talking…

CHAPTER 85
CRAZY GRAMP (1)

The atmosphere was so grim that even a baby would realize just how serious the current situation was. Lee Sang-Hee started talking after a moment of hesitation.

"Excluding Blue Guild's parties two and seven, the other parties have been isolated in an epic-ranked dungeon. We're not sure if they're still alive and we checked the distress signal this morning. Considering how they didn't send a separate signal afterward, I think it's safe to assume that the parties that entered ran into trouble," she explained.

'That's the problem?'

"They entered the dungeon on August 14th and the last time we were in contact with them was at six-forty this morning. Mr. Seol-Ho?" she asked.

"Yes, that's correct. That's the exact time," he confirmed.

If it was August 14th, then it was before we joined the Blue Guild. I had an idea of what was going on.

'The expedition failed.'

This was one of the typical situations that led to the downfall of a guild or clan. Even though we recently entered the free city of Lindel, I still heard the typical sayings that people said.

'One expedition failure will make a small clan stagger and two expedition failures will cause a large guild to stagger.'

That basically implied just now dangerous dungeon raiding and hunting was. Strong players were naturally the assets of a guild and if those players died during an expedition or if they became disabled, then it meant that the guild's power would immediately decline. This was why clans and guilds usually spent a lot of money on preparing for expeditions. There were even rumors that guilds with slightly bad

reputations would send in trial parties first before their own members.

If the dungeon that was discovered was epic-rank or above, then there was a need to be more careful. Unlike the rare dungeons where monsters simply appeared along with a boss monster afterward, the mechanism for every epic ranked dungeon was slightly different. I had never entered one but based on the dungeon records of other guilds, I could make my own deductions.

'Blue Guild will fall because of an expedition failure.'

Kim Hyun-Sung must have known that this would happen and sending a rescue team was already in the plan. The manpower trapped in the dungeon was far too valuable for them to be simply abandoned.

In addition, Lee Sang-Hee definitely considered each and every player in the dungeon as a part of her family before thinking of them as manpower. Based on her personality, I was certain that she might have even entered the dungeon herself if she could. But the main problem was what decision we were going to make.

While I was thinking about the different possibilities, I heard different voices from the meeting room. They were discussing what they should do about this situation after Lee Sang-Hee finished explaining the situation.

'Even though all this discussion is pointless… '

"How about asking for help from other guilds?"

"We asked the Red Mercenary Guild for help, but the Mercenary Queen is currently away, so we haven't gotten an answer from them yet. I'm not sure how long it'll take for us to receive a reply, but if it's urgent… I don't think the expedition team will remain safe until we received their response."

"So are you suggesting that we should just go in there without coming up with a plan?"

"That's not what I'm suggesting, but even though they stopped signaling this morning, we still can't rule out the possibility that the majority of the members are still alive. They're assets to the guild."

"I agree that sending a rescue team is the right choice, but we lack the manpower.

Even though the purpose is to rescue them and not take over the dungeon, going there by ourselves is…"

"If we decide to form a rescue team, then the retired members can also…"

"Our bodies aren't capable of entering a dungeon anymore. Haha. I honestly feel tired just doing administrative work."

"But we don't have enough people."

"Not enough people? We have party seven with us."

"…"

"Party seven is…"

"Isn't party seven part of the guild's main power?"

'Crazy gramp… '

Even though we weren't saying much, the situation was pretty obvious. They were trying to decide whether they should send a rescue team in order to save the trapped party.

The guild surely had detailed information about the dungeon, but after considering the fact that the information had already failed them once, it meant that this dungeon expedition was definitely dangerous.

Even if Hwang Jung-Yeon, Lee Sang-Hee, and our party entered the dungeon that had devoured five of Blue Guild's parties, there wouldn't be much that we could do. The only thing we could do was check whether they were still alive or not. The problem was how we were going to do this because it seemed that as the discussion continued, it became apparent that Lee Seol-Ho and the other gramps didn't want to go to such a dangerous place.

"There was a reason why we spent a lot of money to recruit them. I'm sure they'll be a huge help."

"The party hasn't even developed properly yet, Mr. Lee Seol-Ho," Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

“Miss Hwang Jung-Yeon, I also know that as well, but right now, we need all the help we can get. It’ll be better than not taking them at all,” he explained.

“But still…”

“The guild is in a crisis and it’s only natural for us to work through it together.”

“If that’s what you think, then how about you come with us, Mr. Lee Seol-Ho?”

“He’s old and senile so it’ll be difficult for him to move. He has dedicated himself to the guild all this time… and since we need someone to protect the guild, it’ll be best if Mr. Lee Seol-Ho remains here.”

“Yes, of course!”

“We won’t be much help anyway even if we did go. *Ahem…”*

“*Ahem.*”

‘What a bunch of bullshitters. These crazy bastards… ’

I couldn't help but laugh all of a sudden because of how ridiculous the situation was.

I wasn’t sure of the details, but it was as if they made a script for all this because their teamwork was amazing. Considering how the crazy gramp kept trying to push us into the dangerous situation made it seem like he was trying to squeeze us our money’s worth. The crazy gramp Lee Seol-Ho would benefit the most if we entered the dungeon with Lee Sang-Hee and Hwang Jung-Yeon.

‘Old and senile my ass.’

It seemed like yesterday when Lee Seol-Ho expressed his violent nature toward me during our first meeting. I could see that his stats weren’t bad and even though he was old, it wasn’t like he couldn’t move his body. It was like watching an energetic old man being dominant at home or outside and then becoming old in public transportation in real-time. It was obvious why he was acting that way. He simply didn’t want to go to a dangerous place.

‘So you want to make a quick buck, huh?’

While they were discussing whether to send in a rescue team or not, they also discussed whether party seven would join as well.

“Party seven isn’t prepared to enter a place like that.”

“*Ahem,* we don’t have a choice.”

“It hasn't even been a year since they came to Lindel.”

“But they’re a part of the Blue Guild so that makes them guild members. They’ve already received a lot of benefits, so we can’t give them any special treatment this time.”

“It’s not special treatment but common sense. No guilds in this city have ever sent a party that hasn’t been here for one year into an epic-ranked dungeon. Wait, I guess there is one. The majority of the guilds that send in trial parties do that.”

“How dare you say trial party? You’re being too harsh. They’re…”

“Stop.”

Lee Sang-Hee stopped their pointless discussion.

“Party seven will stand by at the guild house. Mr. Seol-Ho, Miss Jung-Yeon is right. No matter how fast Mr. Hyun-Sung and the others have been growing… they won’t be much help,” she said.

‘That’s it.’

“Please remain here and protect the guild.”

“But…”

“No buts. This is my decision. For the remaining members, please hurry and make preparations for the expedition. Our goal is to rescue, not to capture. The other members need to start finding out whether we can receive help from the other guilds…” Lee Sang-Hee ordered.

“Got it.”

I wasn't sure if this was what Kim Hyun-Sung wanted, but this was ideal for us. If the people that left as part of the rescue team died or returned with severe injuries, then Kim Hyun-Sung's party would immediately become the strongest party within the Blue Guild. Basically, we would be able to take over a medium-sized guild without lifting a finger. Naturally, we would have to take care of all sorts of problems, but if we skipped the complicated process, we would benefit a lot from this.

'It's not just that… '

Losing Lee Sang-Hee or Hwang Jung-Yeon would be problematic as well. Thinking about how Kim Hyun-Sung's kingdom would be losing two competent workers changed the story. It didn't matter if the crazy gramp got killed somewhere, but the two women were good enough to join his kingdom.

It may take a bit of time, but safely inheriting power wasn't a bad option either. The most important question was what Kim Hyun-Sung was going to choose. Not knowing his thoughts really frustrated me, but it didn't mean I couldn't make assumptions. I even thought about just staying quiet from a distance and obtaining whatever benefits came my way, but… the Kim Hyun-Sung I knew would probably…

"We'll go with you," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

…say something like that.

"Excuse me?" Lee Sang-Hee asked.

"I told you that my party would join you," he said again.

"I appreciate the offer, but… that's…"

As someone that had to support the regressor, I had no choice but to cheer him on. I did contemplate a bit, but I immediately made a decision. I would also feel uncomfortable if we let Hwang Jung-Yeon or Lee Sang-Hee get pushed into a dangerous situation since I received a lot of help from them.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung is right. It's only right for us to go with you," I commented.

'Even though I'm a bit worried… '

There was definitely a reason. Kim Hyun-Sung may have an idea on how to take over

the dungeon or there could be something that we could obtain through this dungeon expedition. After all, he might be nice, but he wasn't an overly kind-hearted person.

After taking a deep breath, I spoke again. "Recently, our party members experienced an enormous amount of growth. Everyone obtained their epic-ranked third jobs, making their main stats in the low 60s while Ha-Yan's is in the 70s."

"That's…"

"Is that true?"

"Huh…"

"No way…"

"I understand that we still aren't capable enough and that our stats are still not enough to enter an epic-ranked dungeon, but we realized that more than anything, we're still members of the Blue Guild. This relationship may have formed due to a contract, but I have never once taken our relationship lightly," I explained.

"Oh."

"We received help from a lot of people and this time, we would like to offer our assistance even though it may not be much. If we believe that we will be in too much danger during the expedition, we'll do our best to keep ourselves under control. I just hope that you'll consider our offer to lend you a hand, even if it's not much," I told her.

When I slightly lowered my head, there was an immediate reaction. My action looked dumb, but it wasn't bad.

"We would really like to join you," I added.

"Hahaha, how charming."

The crazy gramp was even smiling at me.

"Miss Lee Sang-Hee, Mr. Ki-Young, and Mr. Hyun-Sung are offering their assistance, so why not take them with you? If they've already changed to their third jobs, then I'm certain that they'll be able to help you. Hahaha."

Getting rid of that old man in any way possible was the right thing to do and I was sure that I wasn't the only one that had that thought.

CHAPTER 86
CRAZY GRAMP (2)

"I think that'll be best," I said.

"I didn't know that you had such strong feelings toward the guild, hahaha," Lee Seol-Ho laughed.

"…"

"Of course, he should."

'Crazy gramps.'

I had no idea about the contributions of those old gramps to the Blue Guild in the past, but considering how much Lee Sang-Hee respected them, it was possible they weren't like this in the past. I also thought that they might have a deep relationship with the unknown guild master, but that was all stories of the past.

'Crazy gramp.'

I was at the point of gnashing my teeth because I felt very bitter about the fact that our party's will and the will of those old gramps were the same.

"I'm certain they'll be helpful since they have already changed to their third jobs."

"They're really amazing. It was worth investing a lot of money into them."

Hwang Jung-Yeon was looking at Lee Seol-Ho as if he was being absurd. It was different from the expressions she showed me so far. She frowned so much that her optimistic nature didn't fit her, but it was natural for her to make that expression since it seemed like Lee Seol-Ho was watching a situation that was irrelevant to him.

"The guild members that recently joined are volunteering to go with us, but the people that should protect the guild are being quiet. Have you not considered volunteering first before pushing others to do it?" Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

It wasn't just Lee Seol-Ho. It applied to a few others as well. They seemed like they were afraid and also a bit embarrassed at the same time. I guess they had a conscience because they turned gloomy as they looked away.

"*Ahem…*"

"This body of mine isn't strong enough to stand on the front line anymore."

"I remember that just a moment ago, you said we needed even a little bit of power," Hwang Jung-Yeon retorted.

"Aren't all the roles that we have for the guild all different? It's the same for us non-combatants… it's been a while since Mr. Lee Seol-Ho retired and the same applies to the other executives here. Standing on the front line at this age… I'm sure we'll only get in the way."

"Really? It seems to me like you're just trying to avoid the responsibility," she said.

"You're being harsh."

"I don't think I'm wrong. Just be honest. Say that you don't want to go," she argued.

"*Huh…* don't you think you're being too harsh?!"

"I'm sure you know very well just who's the harshest person right now," she answered.

I noticed that their emotions were getting stronger. If I was in Hwang Jung-Yeon's place, I would've reacted the same way as her, but I wasn't in the position to say anything. I was certain that they were categorized as non-combatants, so taking them with us didn't make sense in the first place.

"I'm embarrassed. You people are so embarrassing," she said.

I could be overthinking, but I thought that Lee Seol-Ho and the other gramps expected us to die and never come back.

Just like my imagination, my scenario was perfect. If the combat group didn't return alive from the epic-ranked dungeon, then they would use the influence that they had been growing all this time to take over the guild and create a new system with Lee

Seol-Ho in the center. The world was changing anyway, so this would be a good opportunity. The chance was low, but they might even hand over the entire Blue Guild to someone else.

'They'll make money.'

Even though the Blue Guild may not have any more combat groups, the assets, the guild house, and the infrastructure that had been built so far were valuable. Considering the possibility that Kim Hyun-Sung could be after the same thing, it wasn't a bad assumption.

What I didn't understand was Lee Seol-Ho's lackeys and their actions.

'Is someone supporting them?'

It was possible. Normally, those types of old gramps weren't the type to gamble unless they had someone supporting them from the back. They were the type to pressure the young members to gamble while they wanted to live a safe life. I thought that maybe those old gramps got to their current position by sacrificing many people, but if that wasn't the case, then it didn't matter because it wouldn't change the fact that they were like stagnant water.

Just as the atmosphere was getting really heated, Lee Sang-Hee spoke up once again. "Please stop. I'm sure the others are frustrated as well. You acting all worked up like this isn't like you, Miss Jung-Yeon."

"But, Master…"

"We cannot take the executive officers to a dungeon and the same goes for Mr. Lee Seol-Ho. He has already retired and considering the fact that he has been ill recently, taking him with us isn't a reasonable decision. Of course, I completely understand how you feel because I feel the same way. Honestly, I'm not happy with the actions that all of you are showing right now," said Lee Sang-Hee.

"Oh…"

"That's…"

"*Ahem.*"

“Nothing we can… *ahem.*”

“It wasn’t like this before… and I’m very embarrassed to show this side to both Mr. Hyun-Sung and Mr. Ki-Young. This wasn’t the image I wanted for the Blue Guild. I understand why everyone is acting this way, but it’s true that we can’t go to a dungeon with non-combatant members. I know that your condition isn’t like what it was before, however… I’m very disappointed by the actions that Mr. Lee Seol-Ho and the others have shown. No, I’m disappointed in myself the most because of my incompetence,” she explained.

I noticed how quiet the old gramps became. Even pretending to go with us to the dungeon would have decreased the disappointment by half, but instead of doing that, they pushed Kim Hyun-Sung and me into the job, so Lee Sang-Hee would understandably feel disappointed.

Lee Sang-Hee looked at us. While I was contemplating what I had to say to convince her to take us with her, I heard her speak. “Mr. Hyun-Sung and Mr. Ki-Young.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry about repeating what was said earlier and I know very well that I’m being shameless. If it’s alright with you… could you join us in this expedition?”

Her voice was trembling and not only that, but Lee Sang-Hee had even lowered her head. She was biting her lips and there were tears in her eyes.

‘It’s understandable for her to change her mind.’

If it was a month ago, even Lee Sang-Hee wouldn’t agree with taking us.

‘So that’s why.’

I guess stats that were over 60 and the third job were enough to enter an epic-ranked dungeon and that was probably the reason why she changed her mind. Honestly, the Blue Guild was in the worst situation. We had to enter a dungeon with the guild’s main power and to make things worse, we didn't know whether the parties in the dungeon were still alive. I understood her feeling of wanting to at least bring us with her since we were the guild’s last hope and currently, Kim Hyun-Sung’s

party, the one I was a part of, looked quite amazing. It was quite obvious what Kim Hyun-Sung's answer was going to be after hearing the mother of the guild, Lee Sang-Hee's request.

"Of course."

It was such an obvious answer that I smirked.

"Thank you," she said.

"We're only doing what needs to be done," he replied.

"Then, we'll form a rescue team immediately and leave for the expedition," she said.

"Okay."

"The members will be me, party two and party seven. We'll be leaving in 30 minutes, so please prepare for the expedition as soon as possible." Lee Sang-Hee ordered.

"Okay."

"For those who'll remain in the guild, please try to make contact with the Red Mercenary Guild and the other guilds. Please ask them to send help as soon as you get in contact with them." She ordered the others.

"Okay."

"Mr. Seol-Ho."

"I really hope you don't disappoint me. And… I'll trust you," she told him.

"I'll repay you for your trust, Miss. Lee Sang-Hee. As soon as I get in touch with the other guilds, I'll make sure they set off together," he responded.

"Thank you."

Lee Sang-Hee left the room immediately as if there wasn't any time to waste. Hwang Jung-Yeon also left the room after lightly nodding toward me and even the administration team started to become busy. It was the same for me and Kim Hyun-Sung.

After heading to the first floor, we explained the situation and the other party members nodded. Seeing how things were going well under Sun Hee-Young's lead, I thought that there wasn't a need for me to do any huge preparations for this expedition. The timing was also perfect since I had other things I had to do other than preparing for the expedition.

'Trust my ass.'

Lee Sang-Hee was a good person, but she wasn't the ideal leader. If I were to exaggerate a bit, she was an idiotic leader. Trusting in someone was a good method when dealing with talented people. For example, like Deok-Gu and Ha-Yan. I was sure that Lee Sang-Hee felt the same way about Lee Seol-Ho and his lackeys as I did when I looked at Deok-Gu and Ha-Yan, but dealing with people like those old gramps in this way wouldn't be a huge help. I didn't really know what Lee Sang-Hee's idea of trust was. Perhaps she was trusting those that stayed with the guild up until now or believed that everyone would be together even when the guild became unstable. Well, it didn't matter which one it was, but those types of trust were easily betrayed.

In my opinion, the old gramps up there were no different from the people in the slums where Sun Hee-Young had volunteered at. The only difference between them was that the people here were luckier than the people in the slums and the fact that they had stepped on others to climb the ranks. I wasn't criticizing them because that could also be considered a skill, but I was certain that was the only thing they knew how to do.

'Trust is… '

It was a feeling that could only be maintained when two people could scratch each other's backs and in that sense, the old gramps probably thought there wasn't anything they could get from Lee Sang-Hee. If that really were the case, then there was no way that her trust could be maintained.

"We'll leave in 30 minutes…" I said.

"Excuse me?"

"It's nothing, Ha-Yan," I replied.

"Are you taking anything else with you, oppa?" she asked.

“By the way Ha-Yan, could you call Ye-Ri for me?” I asked her.

“Excuse me?”

“There’s something I need to ask her to do… we don’t have a lot of time,” I told her.

“Okay.”

After Jung Ha-Yan quickly left, I saw Kim Ye-Ri looking at me with a slightly suspicious look moments later.

‘She’s fast.’

“Could I ask you to do something for me?” I asked Ye-Ri.

She nodded lightly.

“It’ll be helpful to Mr. Hyun-Sung as well.”

“Okay,” she agreed.

“Could you deliver a message to a person named Lee Ji-Hye in the Black Swan Guild?” I asked.

“Lee Ji-Hye?” she asked.

“Yes, Lee Ji-Hye. If possible, try not to get caught by others… and of course, you’re not allowed to read it,” I informed her.

“Okay…”

“If you tell her that it’s from me, she’ll welcome you. You have to be quick,” I told her.

“Okay.”

Kim Ye-Ri immediately left and for some reason, different thoughts popped into my head. It was honestly difficult to tell whether my actions were right, but I believe that this was somewhat the answer.

‘Why?’

Because I knew very well that once the trust was broken, they would become my enemy.

“It’s the perfect day to clean up.”

It was time to drain out the stagnant water.

CHAPTER 87
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (1)

When Kim Ye-Ri brought Lee Ji-Hye's letter, I heard Lee Sang-Hee's voice.

"We'll be heading out now."

"Okay."

Naturally, I gave a small nod. I stood up from my seat and stuffed the letter into my pocket. By the time we exited the dungeon, the plan would already be in motion. As such, entering the dungeon for now was the right thing to do.

There were a total of 14 people. Six people from Kim Hyun-Sung's party, seven people from the party that Hwang Jung-Yeon managed, and the leader of the expedition Lee Sang-Hee. We lacked the numbers, but the formation was pretty good. The fact that Lee Sang-Hee was a paladin with stats over 90 was important. Even though she lacked the qualities of an ideal leader, she was an extremely competent combat member. Out of all the vanguards that I had seen so far, she was the most ideal tanker. Even though her agility was low, her magic was 77 and her ability to heal herself was something no other tanker in Lindel could imitate.

'The same goes for Hwang Jung-Yeon.'

Party two's overall stats looked pretty good. They maintained their stats between 70 and 80 and their potential wasn't bad either. The members that possessed those kinds of stats were good enough to enter an epic-ranked dungeon.

"Since we don't have time, I'll explain the situation while heading to the dungeon. As I've mentioned before, our goal isn't taking control," Lee Sang-Hee spoke up.

"Okay."

"Our goal is to check for survivors and rescue them. If we confirm that there aren't any survivors, we'll leave immediately. Rescuing the survivors is important, but your safety is the most important, so please always keep that in mind," she added.

“All right.”

“The dungeon’s name is Cursed Shrine and it’s an epic-ranked dungeon. The monsters that appear often are spirits and the Undead and other than that, nothing else has been confirmed. We’ll be searching for survivors as safely as possible until help arrives,” she explained.

“How long will it take?” someone asked.

“The dungeon was discovered on an Undead hunting ground located in the west area of Lindel, so it’ll take about eight hours for us to reach there,” Lee Sang-Hee answered.

“I guess it won’t take that long.”

It definitely felt like we prepared for this at the last minute. It would be understandable if it was us preparing, but the fact that this was all the information they had was surprising. I still couldn’t understand how this happened despite the fact that many parties had previously entered the dungeon. I just couldn’t accept the fact that the only information they had was the location of the dungeon and the types of monsters within it. But I would understand if this was a rare-ranked dungeon.

‘Maybe there was a reason why they had no choice but to go in.’

The reason for their failure could also be because they were too arrogant and thought along the lines of…

‘*With this much power, nothing is going to happen.’*

I was a bit curious, so I spoke up. “There’s not enough information.”

Hwang Jung-Yeon nodded and replied. “I think it’s because they rushed in.”

“Was there a reason why?” I asked.

“Yes… they didn’t have enough time to prepare for the expedition. Since almost all of the guild’s power had entered the dungeon, we made the mistake of thinking that nothing would happen despite it being an epic-ranked dungeon. You do know that the guild’s guild master is cursed, right?” she asked.

This was the first time I heard of this.

“No, I’ve never heard that before,” I answered.

“Well, we have kept it a secret from the public. The people around knew about it and that’s why they said that it was top secret. I’m sure that Miss Lee Sang-Hee was going to tell you when the time was right,” she explained.

“*Hm…*”

“It happened before your party joined. The guild master was hit by an unknown curse and in order to break it, he forcefully entered the Cursed Shrine. At that time, we didn’t think that it was unreasonable because the guild members that left on the expedition were veterans that hunted large, special monsters and they were experienced regarding epic-ranked dungeons,” Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

‘I would’ve… ’

…had similar thoughts.

If the party was made up of five people who had stats similar to Hwang Jung-Yeon’s, then it would be worth trying a legendary-ranked dungeon. I wouldn’t think that an epic-ranked dungeon would be a problem.

“Are you saying that there’s a hint at the Cursed Shrine about breaking the curse?” I asked.

“Honestly, it hasn’t been confirmed yet. The guild master got the curse during the process of finding the Cursed Shrine, so of course, they thought that the dungeon had a way of breaking it since it caused it. They had extended their hand out in order to open the dungeon door…” she answered.

“I see.”

Basically, the Blue Guild’s guild master got cursed during the process of finding the dungeon and in order to break that curse, the remaining members entered the dungeon. It was as if the dungeon pulled those humans in.

‘They had no choice but to enter the dungeon.’

I started to feel kind of anxious because the way it happened was very similar to a horror movie. Usually, the friends that entered to save their friends were the ones who would die and all I could do was hope that such a plot wouldn't happen to us.

"You don't seem all that surprised, Mr. Ki-Young," she said.

"Not really. I had assumed that the Blue Guild's guild master was experiencing some kind of problem. I was curious, but I thought that it was an issue that I shouldn't bring up since I was also busy trying to grow," I replied.

"Ohh, I see. I'm sure Miss Lee Sang-Hee doesn't want you to worry about other things too," she said, nodding.

"Yes, I understand."

"Oh, Ha-Yan."

I must have spent too much time with Hwang Jung-Yeon because I heard that Jung Ha-Yan was looking for me. After greeting the latter, I started walking with her. I guess she started to feel better because I noticed her smiling. Since this expedition started with a serious atmosphere, I restrained myself from holding her hand as we walked and it seemed like Jung Ha-Yan understood because she didn't pull on my sleeve like she usually did.

The road was so rough that a carriage wouldn't be able to travel on it. I kind of had a difficult time because my stamina was weak, but the party's speed toward the destination was very fast.

'Since we're in a hurry.'

They weren't being considerate of those with low stamina, I understood their thoughts, so in order to keep up with the march, I had no choice but to drink the stamina potion I brought with me.

Since we would be going up against the Undead, the priests were trying to save their holy magic as much as possible.

In less than a day, we reached the area where the Undead was and it was an area that our party was seeing for the first time. It was also our first time going up against the Undead, so I naturally started looking around.

"*Ugh…*"

The priests weren't trying to hide the frown on their faces. Although not as much as the others since she was a dark priest, even Sun Hee-Young seemed affected by it. I guess Kim Ye-Ri was more of a scaredy-cat than I thought because she stuck close to Kim Hyun-Sung while the cowardly Park Deok-Gu was intimidated by the gloomy atmosphere. Among the members of our party, Jung Ha-Yan and Kim Hyun-Sung were the only ones that seemed fine. It was understandable for Kim Hyun-Sung since he already knew about this place, but I just couldn't understand why Jung Ha-Yan was smiling so brightly.

It felt like it was getting darker the deeper we went in and it wasn't just because it was night. The atmosphere itself that enveloped this place was gloomy.

'I'm getting a bad feeling.'

The feeling under my feet was unpleasant and the place felt damp. When I heard the sound of an Undead from somewhere, I became even more anxious. To be more exact, this place made me feel irritated and the closer we got to our destination, those emotions started to get stronger.

'A curse?'

I wasn't sure but it was probably because the location itself gave off an unpleasant feeling.

"Doesn't this place give off a really irritating vibe? It's difficult to explain…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"I can feel it too, Deok-Gu. I'm sure it'll get worse when we reach our destination," I replied.

"*Ugh.*"

"I don't want to deal with monsters like the Undead…" he complained.

"Nothing we can do about it," I told him.

It didn't take long for us to reach our destination as we whispered to each other. The place we arrived at was a small room inside the shrine and of course, I was very

leery. When the bookshelves that were in the small room moved back, we saw the entrance to the dungeon. There was another secret entrance in the room and even though I had no idea about the details, there was a monster that was hanging upside down while wearing a pendant and there were other decorations that made me feel uncomfortable. It didn't feel like a shrine and felt more like a…

'…a place where they worship the devil.'

When I looked at the entrance that led underground, I felt like I could now understand the curse that the guild master received upon discovering this place. Honestly, I felt like I got cursed just by looking at the place. I wasn't sure how careless they were when they entered, but I guess the Blue Guild's guild master had been overconfident.

'I feel like I'm going to get cursed just by breathing… '

Having the courage to extend your hand out could be considered a talent too. People who were too cautious like me would never come anywhere close to a place like this until they had some kind of confirmation that it was safe. While I was looking around and getting the feel of the place, I heard Lee Sang-Hee's voice.

"I'll enter first. Party seven will enter next and party two will enter after. For the priests, please start reciting a purification spell."

"Okay."

Sun Hee-Young and a man in party two began to recite their spells. When a light poured down on us, my mind became calm for a moment and then it felt like I was at ease.

'It's effective.'

I guess the location itself gave a basic debuff.

Everyone nodded and after Lee Sang-Hee turned around, she started walking.

"Let's go, Mr. Ki-Young."

"Hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu said.

“Okay.”

It went without saying that we entered after her. I immediately heard some familiar information.

[You’ve entered the epic-ranked dungeon, Cursed Shrine. Confirmed [??/??] members.]

I thought that we were immediately going to battle, but that wasn’t the case.

Unlike the Garden of Horror which looked as if the scenery had completely changed, the dungeon we were currently in didn’t look so different from the outside. It basically felt like we entered a large shrine that was located beneath the shrine up above. Despite my nervousness, the inside was pretty empty and as expected, I saw people moving around busily. The archers were the busiest among them.

When I started looking around, people started talking.

“I don’t think they’re anywhere here. I’m not exactly sure yet, but the traces that are here look really old.”

The archer was right. The area near this place was safe, so we could assume that this area had been cleared successfully. I did have a slight headache, but the uncomfortable feeling I had before didn’t envelop my body.

“Overall, I think they… moved quickly.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, I think we can move quicker.”

“Let’s do that then. Priests, please make preparations so that you can recite spells at any moment,” Lee Sang-Hee ordered.

“Okay, got it.”

The party moved faster than I expected but that didn't mean that they didn't have their guards up. I didn't see an Undead's shadow, but since this dungeon had swallowed many parties, they all knew that they had to be cautious.

'I think that they took over without any issues.'

It was obvious without having the eye of an archer. I noticed a very clean interior the deeper we went in. I didn't really see any traces of battle, so I could tell how easily the other party broke through this place.

"Next."

"Okay."

"We'll enter the next room," Lee Sang-Hee said.

"All right."

"The next room…"

"Yes."

All of a sudden, we heard a voice that we had never heard before.

- You'll be cursed.

'What the… '

CHAPTER 88
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (2)

- You'll be cursed.

'What kind of bullshit… '

I wasn't the only one that heard it. I saw everyone looking around, so I was certain that the voice had filled the entire shrine.

"Just now."

"Priests, please recite a purification spell again…" Lee Sang-Hee requested.

"Okay."

Nothing serious was happening, but hearing a voice like that definitely made me feel nervous. It was to the point that I wanted to leave this place. Lee Sang-Hee and party two still remained calm, but our party looked a bit confused.

- You'll be cursed…

"Do you feel magic anywhere?"

"No, I don't feel anything. My magic sense doesn't… show any reaction and the same goes for holy magic," Hwang Jung-Yeon replied.

- Intruders will be cursed…

"It seems like a function that's been installed within the dungeon."

"I wonder what kind of curse it is…"

"It's difficult to tell since all we can hear is its voice," Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

"Let's move back… we'll move back immediately and use a holy shield spell," Lee

Sang-Hee suggested.

All of a sudden, amidst the sound of the wind blowing, the scene in front of us started to turn white. I had no idea what was going on, but I started to feel dizzy and nauseous. I wanted to throw up. It felt like the world around me was changing, but this wasn't exactly the best way to describe it. The phenomenon was difficult to describe. The thought that everyone else must be experiencing the same thing as me only lasted for a moment.

After the scenery changed, I heard a voice coming from somewhere, which surprised me.

- Why did you do it?

- Why… did you abandon me?

'Oh no.'

The person in front of me was a woman whose name I didn't know, but her face was familiar. During the tutorial, she was the woman that was being eaten by monsters. This wasn't a strange situation because I had always felt sorry for her when I chose water and food over her.

"What kind of shitty situation is this?"

The way the woman walked toward me as blood was dripping out of her was a sight to see. She looked exactly the same when she was getting eaten by the monsters.

I did frown, but I wasn't scared because I already knew that…

'This is fake.'

She was definitely fake.

- It was painful. So much. I thought that you were going to save me… I believed you were going to do that, but you turned your back on me.

"Damn it."

- You're a shitty person.

“Park Hye-Young.”

I even heard the voice of Park Hye-Young who died under Jung Ha-Yan’s hands. Her eyes were filled with resentment and her limbs were severed as she looked straight at me. She felt bitter about the fact that I didn’t choose her and of course, her situation was a bit different from the woman whose name I didn’t know. I had the choice to save her, but…

‘There’s no need for me to feel guilty.’

…That had been the most reasonable choice.

- You always protect yourself with those thoughts of yours. It was a reasonable choice and you probably couldn’t help it. It’s really funny. In my eyes, you and I are the same type of people.

“Are you even worthy of saying something like that? You crazy murderer. I’m completely different from you.”

‘Jung Jin-Ho.’

The way he walked toward me with Kim Hyun-Sung’s sword in his neck looked a bit grotesque.

- We’re not that different at all. We’re the same type of people. We’re selfish and greedy. Did you kill Mr. Seok-Woo because you thought it was necessary?

The citizen of the slums that Sun Hee-Young killed, Yoo Seok-Woo, and two of Jung Jin-Ho’s lackeys. Those that had a connection with me started appearing one by one.

‘It's this kind of a curse*?*’

I didn’t think that the others were seeing what I was seeing. I might not have been aware of it, but all the things I was seeing right now were the types of situations I never wanted to see. I guess there was still some guilt left inside me because I wasn’t in a good mood.

- You killed them.

“Shut up.”

- Rationalization. You're a coward.

"There's nothing bad about rationalizing since that's how humans are designed. Humans are bound to rationalize any situation, you idiots," I retorted.

- And you're feeling guilty.

"It's an emotion I can have, but I don't regret it."

- Piece of shit.

"Is that all you know how to say? No matter how much you blame me, the reality is that I'm standing here and you're looking at me as I stand here because you all died. That won't ever change. If I got another chance, I would do the same thing," I told them.

- You'll eventually be with us.

"Damn it, that's your wish."

My sight started to clear up. When the ones that were looking at me started to disappear, I became nauseous.

"*Blehhh.*"

I couldn't help but throw up whatever was inside me. Seeing the corpses of the dead wasn't exactly the most pleasant experience. Unlike a moment ago when I was being chatty, my entire body was now covered in cold sweat. My legs started shaking and even though I knew that they weren't real, my lips kept drying up.

'It's fake.'

'Shut up.'

Even after returning to reality, I could still hear their voices whispering into my ear.

'Damn it.'

- You killed us.

'Damn it.'

- You killed us. It was you!

'Damn it.'

It affected me more than I thought and an unpleasant feeling started to fill me up. When I started breathing heavily, I felt someone tapping my shoulder. I was surprised and subconsciously slapped the hand that was on my shoulder, but then I heard a comforting voice.

"Go away!"

"Are you okay?"

I saw Kim Hyun-Sung, and I started to feel a little comfortable. This place wasn't that place.

"Oh… yes. I'm fine," I answered.

Kim Hyun-Sung was sending me his mana little by little.

'The others… '

I was sure that the others were experiencing the same phenomenon as me. As I expected, the scenery I saw was difficult to explain in words.

"*Ahhhhhh…*"

Kim Ye-Ri was holding onto herself as she was shaking and then I noticed her waving her hands as if she was trying to shake something off. She looked as if she was trying to push away the people that were approaching her. Her mouth was moving as if she wanted to say something, but she had a hard time talking.

"Stop… stop. Mom… mom! Help me. Mom… please…" she said.

It was probably a memory of hers when she was still in the slums and just by looking at her, she was obviously experiencing something unpleasant. Meanwhile, Park

Deok-Gu was cowering. Seeing him cowering and trembling without saying a word gave me an idea of what he was seeing. I guess Sun Hee-Young was looking at a moment during *that* time because she was crying. She wasn't screaming, but there was blood trickling down her lips. She was biting down hard on her lips. Out of all of them, I couldn't understand what was going on with Jung Ha-Yan the most.

"Noooooo! I don't want to. Please. Please. Oppa. Oppa."

'…'

"Please, it was my fault. It was all my fault. Please. Please… I'm sorry. I'll do better from now on. Please don't leave me. Please…"

'Shit.'

I couldn't help but think that her situation was dire. Tears were flowing down her eyes and there was blood on her nails. Jung Ha-Yan had ripped her flesh with her own hands and seeing as how she lost some parts of her hair, I guess she pulled out her hair as well. Not only was she having a hard time breathing, but she was crying so much that her voice was cracking.

"N-No…"

'…'

"Don't do that with that woman. Don't do that, Oppa. I'm sorry. No… no! No!"

I had an idea of what she was seeing. Besides her, the others were shaking their heads and showing strange reactions. I did see a few coming back to their senses in the middle of it, but they either collapsed and vomited or they remained confused. On Lee Sang-Hee's end, she kept apologizing to someone.

"I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I really am…"

I wasn't exactly sure, but it seemed like she was apologizing to the people that were in here. I could understand why she was reacting this way since she must be worried about the survivors. Hwang Jung-Yeon finally returned to her senses because I saw her looking around while secretly crying.

Besides Kim Hyun-Sung, the people that came back to their senses had high

intelligence stats. There were differences individually, but I guess the amount of intelligence had influenced what was going on. Unfortunately, Jung Ha-Yan was a special case.

'Her mental state is unstable.'

She couldn't push away whatever she was seeing right now.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, when did you…"

"It hasn't been that long for me either," he replied.

"How long has it been?" I asked.

"I don't think it's been that long. I don't really understand it either, but…" he said.

It felt like I was in there for at least 10 minutes, so it was difficult to believe that it only happened for a moment. Of course, resolving the situation was more important than grasping the situation. After getting rid of the questions that were in my head, I quickly spoke to Kim Hyun-Sung. "How can we wake them up?"

"I think letting your mana quietly flow into them is the best although, holy magic will be more effective… Mr. Ki-Young, please take care of Miss Ha-Yan first," he said.

"Oh, okay."

I guess Kim Hyun-Sung thought that it would be best for him to wake Sun Hee-Young up first. With a slightly haggard face, Hwang Jung-Yeon did the same and started walking toward the priests that were in her party. As I calmed myself a little bit, the strange feeling that restrained me started to disappear, so I quietly headed toward Jung Ha-Yan.

"I need to kill…"

'What is she talking about?'

"I-I need to kill. All… I need to kill all of them so that I can become one with oppa. Yeah. I should. That's what I should do. I'll kill them all," Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

Since she was mumbling, I was sure that the others didn't hear her. I wasn't sure

what she meant by being one with me, but it sounded scary. When I approached her quietly and let my mana flow into her after grabbing her hand, I could see that Jung Ha-Yan's complexion was improving.

"I'll always be with you," I whispered into her ear.

If it was Jung Ha-Yan, I was sure that she would quickly come back to her senses and that was when I felt her waking up. Her eyes were definitely open, but it seemed like she was still trying to come back to her senses. Her labored breathing started to calm down and when her limbs stopped trembling, I knew that she had returned to her senses. Her eyes, which looked like they were spacing out, landed on me.

"Oppa?"

"Are you okay now?" I asked.

"O… oppa," she said again.

"Yeah."

She wrapped her arms around my neck tightly as if she didn't want to let me go. I was suffocating, but I couldn't make it noticeable.

"Oppa… oppa, oppa."

"Yeah, I'm right here," I told her.

Earlier, Jung Ha-Yan sounded like she was crying, but now she was sobbing. She realized that what she had seen just now was nothing more than a hallucination. I felt like I was taking care of a child that had a nightmare, but it wasn't so bad.

- You'll abandon her too.

I heard the voice again, but of course, I ignored it since it was probably the effect of the curse.

- It's not an effect of the curse. It's a voice coming from your heart.

I was sure that I wasn't the only one who could hear this voice. Even after waking up, I noticed the others talking to themselves.

- In the end, no one will be by your side because you're going to abandon all of them. The people that are beside you right now will someday be with us and all of us will be watching you. Wait and see…

"It's really you, right oppa?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Yeah." I nodded.

"It's really you…" she mumbled.

"Yeah, that's right," I told her.

When I saw how Jung Ha-Yan was trying to make sure that I was actually here with her, I knew that I wasn't the only one who could hear that voice. She must have heard that voice just now. I couldn't help but feel anxious because of the unknown voice.

I gulped as I looked at Jung Ha-Yan who seemed confused.

'I'm getting worried… '

It felt like a bomb was going to explode. That was how unstable Jung Ha-Yan looked.

CHAPTER 89
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (3)

Honestly, it wasn't just Jung Ha-Yan. I could say that I was one of the better ones, but it was obvious who amongst us was feeling anxious. Kim Ye-Ri was one of them, but I could understand it since she was still young. She always stuck to Kim Hyun-Sung like a cicada and her usual calm expression wasn't the kind of expression a child would have. I wasn't sure what she saw, but based on her reaction, I guess it was something horribly traumatic.

It was the same for Jung Ha-Yan. I wasn't certain, but she probably saw an image of me abandoning her. I was able to realize once again that this curse brought out one's weakness.

Anyway, I saw people coming back to their senses one by one and the majority of them had escaped from the curses' influence, however, no one spoke about it first. While I was stroking Jung Ha-Yan's hair, we heard a voice once the situation calmed down. It was Lee Sang-Hee.

"D-Damage report please."

"There's no damage. This type of curse appears to be part of the spiritual world and I don't think there are any other effects. I believe that visual and auditory hallucinations are the effects of the curse."

"Is there anyone that's unable to move?" she asked.

"No one sustained physical injuries."

There wasn't any physical damage, but that didn't mean that there wasn't any damage at all because what everyone experienced was mentally exhausting. I could see why the Blue Guild's party got annihilated here. Just like its name, assuming that these curses overlapped or worsened…

'It's going to get serious.'

The situation could get out of hand and become even worse.

“Is there anyone that’s hearing things?” Lee Sang-Hee asked.

No one answered. I was sure that they could somewhat hear it. I slowly opened my mouth to answer her question. “I can hear something.”

“I see.”

“I believe it’s the same for the others,” I added.

“I don’t think the holy purification spell is breaking the curse, so it seems like the curse was built into the dungeon itself. There’s a good chance that it activates every time we enter a certain area or when a certain time passes.”

‘That’s a good assumption.’

She had the same thought as me. When I glanced over at Kim Hyun-Sung, I noticed him nodding. It might not have been the perfect answer, but I thought that we somewhat found an answer.

“Or the symptoms we just experienced could get worse. If this type of curse activates while we’re fighting the Undead…”

We would obviously suffer a lot, but the most important part was the curse itself that had just activated. No matter how much I thought about it, the Undead and spirits were easier to deal with. Just like its name, the only way to control the Cursed Shrine was to break the curse.

- In the end, you’re going to be alone.

‘Shut up.’

I was certain that the situation would become out of control if we didn’t break the curse. Lee Sang-Hee and party two were able to resist the voices that they were hearing right now, but excluding Kim Hyun-Sung, party seven’s situation was different. It was embarrassing to say it myself, but Kim Hyun-Sung’s party was growing really fast. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that we were growing at a ridiculous rate. I was currently keeping up with the party through the many catalysts and Ramus Tucker’s Introduction to Alchemy. It wasn’t necessary for me to talk

about the members who started off with above legendary stats, but just because their stats were high didn't mean that the party was strong. The people in our party had mental issues, and it meant that their physical growth was faster than their mental growth.

'Was that what he was aiming for?'

Taking that into consideration, I thought that perhaps Kim Hyun-Sung brought us here on purpose, but the possibility of that was low. He wasn't the type to play with people's lives. If it was an average-ranked dungeon, then I would have nodded, but…

'The current situation is serious.'

It was just like I said. The others were experiencing something similar and it wasn't just our party. In this situation, there were three choices the group could choose from.

The first choice was to return. We didn't have enough information about the dungeon and even though our main goal was rescuing the survivors, it didn't mean there wasn't anything dangerous here. If the expedition group leader was a bit more cautious, then I was certain that Lee Sang-Hee would pick the first choice.

The second choice was to continue. I honestly didn't want to recommend it, but since we didn't know the condition of the survivors and considering the urgency of the situation, this wasn't such a bad choice.

The last choice would be…

"I think it'll be best to set up a camp here." Lee Sang-Hee suggested.

'That's right.'

"For those with close-ranged jobs, please get into groups and search the areas around us. See if you can find any information or hints about controlling this dungeon. The remaining members will create a camp here. Please start making some food. I think it'll be best if we rest for now. First, with party two in the center…"

"I'll go as well," Kim Hyun-Sung volunteered.

"Are you feeling okay?"

“Yes. I don’t know the reason, but I don’t think the curse affected me that badly. I do hear the voice, but… I’m not really worried about it,” he answered.

“Oh, in that case… I appreciate the help, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

I also thought that this was the best decision. Before everyone had experienced the curse, they were already exhausted. We marched for more than half the day and it had been about six hours since we entered the shrine. If we continued the search in this state, then we would soon reach our limits. It applied especially to the priests and mages since they must be at their limits by now, and they needed time to recover.

“After we sleep here, we’ll immediately go to work in the morning, so please be ready. We’ll stay for three days and if I believe that there isn’t any progress, we’ll leave the dungeon. Also,” she announced.

“Yes?”

“If we can’t break the curse that has been inflicted on us, then I think it’ll be best to think of another way,” she added.

“Is that even possible?”

She was overflowing with confidence since curses were usually semi-permanent.

“Yes, but for now, please focus on recovering. We’ll come up with countermeasures after the search team comes back,” she said.

When Lee Sang-Hee finished talking, Kim Hyun-Sung, Kim Ye-Ri, and the other people with strong capabilities who had been assigned to the search group left the room. The slower members were doing their best to set up the camp. Since Kim Hyun-Sung volunteered to go, I guess he had an idea on how to control the dungeon.

‘He may even bring a different hint.’

When those people headed out, it was obvious what the others had to do. Our job was to take care of the mentality of our children. Even though no one asked me to take care of the others, I could feel them relying on me.

Unlike Sun Hee-Young who had calmed down rather quickly, Deok-Gu was the first

person I had to counsel because he was still standing frozen with a blank expression. Jung Ha-Yan was naturally recovering by sticking next to me. It didn't just apply to me, but seeing others talking amongst themselves helped me realize that talking to the affected people was the solution.

"Deok-Gu."

"Oh, hyung-nim," he said.

He clearly looked haggard and he greeted Jung Ha-Yan who was next to me.

"Are you feeling better?" I asked.

"O-Of course," he answered.

"I'm asking you seriously."

"Y-You don't have to worry about me, hyung-nim. Just worry about noonim since I don't budge easily," he said.

'This pig… '

"What did you see?" I asked.

"It was nothing," he said.

His answer was short. He must be thinking that he was being a burden by showing this side of him. When I stared at him quietly, he started to become slightly anxious.

"I heard the voices of those that I killed and those that died before my eyes," I told him.

"Oh…"

"Yoo Seok-Woo, the woman I couldn't save and I even saw Park Hye-Young's corpse. I also saw Jung Jin-Ho and his lackey's faces too. They told me that I was going to die soon and they're cursing at me right now. They even yelled at me and told me not to rationalize," I explained to him.

"…"

“What about you?” I asked.

He looked like he was deep in his thoughts. He was hesitating whether it was right to tell me or if it was something he didn’t need to tell me. It was natural for him to be cautious since it was related to either his weakness or trauma, but I guess telling him what I saw was a big help. In the end, I saw him talking.

“I-I… saw you and the other party members dying. We were fighting a large monster… and I couldn’t endure it, but th-that wasn’t my intention and when I flinched for a moment, you and noonim got hurt, so I don’t know what I should say… that’s, you see… *ugh*…” he explained.

I guess he was pretty shocked. Even while talking, he was crying and stuttering. I knew that Deok-Gu’s mind was weak, but I never imagined that it was this bad.

‘Even when I killed Yoo Seok-Woo… ’

Park Deok-Gu forced himself to not look at it.

“And then I saw you and noonim criticizing me. That… it was because of me… that it was all my fault… I wasn’t able to do anything and just stood there while trembling… I saw the same situation again, but I couldn’t move. I couldn’t move at all…” he added.

“What happened next?” I asked.

“It was the same… I couldn’t save you and just…”

“Do you still hear the voices?”

He nodded.

“What does it say?”

“Coward, it’s all because of you is what it’s saying,” he answered.

“Who’s saying that?” I asked.

“It’s yours and noonim’s voice. I can also hear Mr. Hyun-Sung’s voice, Hee-Young noonim’s voice, and even the kid’s voice. Is it the same for you, hyung-nim?” he asked.

“Of course. I hear the same thing. Like I said earlier, I hear it now, but it doesn’t affect me,” I answered.

“As expected from you, hyung-nim…” he said.

“Don’t say things like… as expected from you, hyung-nim. What you experienced were just simple visual and auditory hallucinations,” I told him.

Even though I was saying it to Park Deok-Gu, it also applied to Sun Hee-Young and Jung Ha-Yan who were beside me.

“There’s no need for you to waver or even worry about it because it’s all bullshit. Just ignore it. Just focus on the reality you’re seeing right now,” I advised him.

“Oh…”

“If I can do it, then you can do it even better, Deok-Gu,” I told him.

“Okay, got it,” he said.

“Just keep thinking about that. If I can do it, then you can do it even better.”

Obviously, I knew this wasn’t enough, but since he listened to me pretty well, I was sure that it was somewhat effective. I was certain of it because he looked like he was starting to feel better. Aside from that, we talked about other things. I had a short conversation with Sun Hee-Young and also spoke to Lee Sang-Hee, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and Kim Hyun-Sung about how we should approach this while eating together. In addition, I also invested my remaining time into Jung Ha-Yan because I thought that it would be best to calm her mentally by constantly talking to her. I thought about talking to Jung Ha-Yan like I did with Park Deok-Gu, but the problem was that she wasn’t showing that much reaction toward me. She probably didn’t want to talk about the nightmare she had seen.

‘…’

When I asked what she saw, I noticed her biting her lips to the point that they looked like they were going to explode, so I had no choice but to give up. She was different from Park Deok-Gu who was trying to pretend that he was okay.

Everyone was on edge, but we were able to endure it. Auditory hallucination was the

only thing that was happening and no one was experiencing anything worse than what we had just experienced. Breaking the curse through holy magic was impossible, but it was helpful in maintaining the current situation.

'Taking a short break is… '

…The best choice. Excluding the people that were on watch, everyone, including myself, were sleeping. Trying to sleep properly was a bit difficult at first, but since I was exhausted from the long expedition, I was able to fall asleep rather quickly, but that didn't mean I was able to keep my eyes closed the entire time.

'Oh… '

It was because I realized that at some point, Jung Ha-Yan was staring at me with her eyes wide open.

"We're going to stay together forever. *Mhm…* no. Oppa would never do that. What you're saying is stupid. Oppa told me to ignore you, so you don't exist," Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

I didn't know who she was having a conversation with, but I heard her whispering into my ear.

"I'm not going to listen to you, you idiot because I can't let oppa die. I'm going to live forever with oppa," she continued.

'Shit… '

"We're going to be together forever. We can live together. Let's stay here together, Oppa. *Hehehe*," Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

Her voice gave me goosebumps.

CHAPTER 90
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (4)

"We're going to be together forever. We can live together. Let's stay here together, oppa. *Hehehe*," Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

Her voice gave me goosebumps. Seeing how she kept on whispering in my ear, I guess she didn't think that I would wake up. Actually, maybe…

'She's not in the condition to make a reasonable judgment.'

Sun Hee-Young was in a similar situation, but for her, she already had a solid set of values and her fundamentals were different from Jung Ha-Yan's who was completely reliant on me. To be exact, the difference was whether she was able to control herself or not although I didn't know whose voice Jung Ha-Yan was hearing…

"I told you I'm not going to listen to you, so stop talking to me. I'm not going to listen anyway," she said to the voice.

Perhaps it was her own voice and based on the situation, my assumption should be correct. She was saying that she needed to kill in order to have me.

"I told you, oppa can't die. Just his legs? He's going to run away? No, he wouldn't. Oppa told me that he loved me. He'll never run away from me… and if I do that, oppa will be in pain. I don't want to do that…" she whispered.

I immediately felt her stroking my leg. Despite the fact that she was only stroking my leg, I wanted to scream. I wanted to push her away, but the problem was that I couldn't because I was currently *sleeping*.

"Just in case? I told you I can't. There's no need to go that far. You idiot, I can't cut off his arms since he won't be able to pat me, and he won't be able to hold me tight… you dummy," Jung Ha-Yan retorted.

"…"

'Shit.'

I knew that her condition was getting worse and I understood why she was acting that way. Besides Jung Ha-Yan's voice, I heard other voices as well. Hearing the voices of that damn Jung Jin-Ho and Park Hye-Young was making my frustration reach its limits. Not only was her mentality unstable to begin with, but now that she was cursed, I was sure that a part of her mind was now worn out since the curse must have influenced her a lot faster than anyone else. She kept telling me that she wasn't going to get influenced by it at all, but from my point of view, Jung Ha-Yan was being swayed by the voice.

However…

'She hasn't turned completely crazy.'

The first proof was that she still realized that she shouldn't show this side of her to other people. Every time someone tossed and turned, she would remain quiet. As such, she must still be in her right mind. While I kept my mouth closed and tried not to open my eyes…

"You think he's awake?" she asked the voice.

"…"

"I don't think so because he hasn't woken up all this time. Once oppa falls asleep, he doesn't wake up easily. Even magic…"

"…"

"…"

"Oh, we're not home. I forgot," she said.

'Sh… '

Even though my eyes were closed, I felt her face getting closer to my face because I felt her labored breathing. It seemed like she was trying to see whether I was really asleep or not. After a long time, I felt her lightly pecking my lips and retreating.

'Whoo… '

After I heard her rustling, I guess she must have thought that it was too dangerous to remain by my side because I couldn't feel Jung Ha-Yan's breathing anymore, and she wasn't touching me either, so this meant that she must have returned to her spot. After some time passed, I thought about slightly opening my eyes, but I heard a voice again.

"See, I told you. He's still sleeping, *hehehe*," she giggled.

I heard her moving again and this time, I thought that she was really far from me. I tried my best to fall asleep, but I wasn't sleepy because I slept earlier and I wasn't too exhausted anymore. However, I did feel like I just got a really difficult homework that was more difficult than dungeon control, so I became anxious. If I were to be blunt, the dungeon was no longer an issue for me.

'Let me organize my thoughts.'

Solving this situation was more important. This wasn't the first time I saw Jung Ha-Yan act this way and the fact that she used a spell on my room and on me was an action I just couldn't understand. However, those spells weren't used to harm me. Instead, they were used to protect me. It was to protect me from her love rivals and to protect me from invisible threats. Even the spell she used on my bed was an act of kindness because she was being considerate of me. Basically, Jung Ha-Yan was trying her best not to harm me in any way. However, the current situation was completely different.

'Right now… '

She was trying to expand her magic in case there was something that could threaten me and based on what happened just now, I was certain of it. Her plan was probably…

'To stay together in this dungeon forever.'

It was so absurd that I was at a loss for words. Thinking that she could obtain water and food from a place like this was ridiculous. She could probably obtain water through magic, but this wasn't a place a human could survive in. Of course, I wasn't sure that Jung Ha-Yan was going to make a move, but I thought that coming up with a plan for something that could happen was the right choice. Under the condition that she really was determined to do something, she had two choices. The first choice

was to kill everyone here and hide. The second choice would be to take me somewhere and disappear. I did consider the second option more, but if the situation became worse, then there was no guarantee that she wouldn't pick the first option.

'Of course… '

Jung Ha-Yan should not be capable enough of killing everyone here…

'…But it's a possibility.'

Jung Ha-Yan was smarter and more straightforward than I thought and she had become different from when she killed Park Hye-Young.

The location we were currently at was a dungeon that had devoured five of the Blue Guild's parties and everyone was experiencing hallucination and auditory hallucinations. Even though we had Kim Hyun-Sung, the variable named Jung Ha-Yan wasn't included in his plan. If Jung Ha-Yan carried out her plan and was successful, then the dungeon name might change from an epic-ranked Cursed Shrine to a legendary-ranked dungeon, Crazy Mage and the Cursed Shrine.

'Crazy Mage and the Cursed Shrine… '

Thinking about it again, I could see its possibility. To Jung Ha-Yan, she probably viewed the people that had come here to take control of the dungeon as people that were trying to destroy her love nest. Out of all the bad endings, it might end up being the worst.

It was obvious, but I didn't want to rot in a place like this forever. This place could end up being a safe and comfortable location, but I wasn't the type that enjoyed my freedom while being suppressed.

'What should I do… '

There were a lot of choices, but taking control of Jung Ha-Yan's mentality was the first thing I needed to do. I ended up having another assignment that I had to handle other than the dungeon control. While I was thinking about the direction I should take moving forward, I guess the sun had come up because people started to move busily and as expected, Jung Ha-Yan's voice was the first voice I heard.

"Oppa, it's time to wake up."

“Oh… okay.”

When I looked at Jung Ha-Yan while nodding, I saw her status window.

[Checking Player Jung Ha-Yan’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Ha-Yan]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 21]

[Nature - ??]

[Job - Archmage - Epic Rank]

[Stats]

[Strength - 17/Below rare growth limit]

[Agility - 15/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 29/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 61/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 22/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 52/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 70/Above legendary growth limit]

[Gear - Divine Protection]

[Attribute - How to Become a Mage - Epic Rank]

[Overall Review - Jung Ha-Yan’s fast growth is the most noticeable. Player Jung Ha-Yan’s understanding of mana and magic is near perfect. She looks like she’s having a

hard time stepping up to a higher rank because of her low intelligence, but I believe she'll gain momentum soon. I feel bad for even mentioning Player Lee Ki-Young. I do see something interesting. I noticed that her nature has changed. You'll have to work hard if you don't want to transform the Cursed Shrine into a new type of dungeon. It's unfortunate because I've grown fond of you, but I pray that you'll survive.]

'I knew that this was going to happen.'

The good thing was that her nature hadn't completely changed yet. I wasn't sure what those question marks meant, but according to the overall review, Jung Ha-Yan was currently standing at a crossroad. A choice of whether she was going to keep her innocent supporter nature or if she was going to change into something completely different. I wasn't sure what kind of nature Jung Ha-Yan was going to change into, but it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it wasn't something positive.

When I looked at Jung Ha-Yan again, she looked the same as usual and the way she was pretending like nothing was wrong made me feel bewildered.

"*Hehehe*," she giggled.

But of course, I had to put on my acting face. When I stroked her face while smiling, I noticed how happy she became.

"Do you still hear the voices, Ha-Yan?" I asked.

"Yes, I still hear a little bit. But I'm not affected by it anymore because it's just a hallucination," she answered.

"What exactly did the voice say?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. I can't really hear it anymore. You don't have to worry," she replied.

Lies.

"Oh, that's a relief. Let's get ready to leave. What about the others?" I asked.

"I heard them say that they're going to leave in 30 minutes. I think everyone was packing up…" she answered.

I noticed her grabbing my hand tightly. With a small smile on my face, I kissed Jung Ha-Yan's lips in the most natural way possible. She wrapped her arms around my neck as if this was her chance, but since we didn't have any time, we didn't do anything more than that. It was like a couple greeting each other in the morning. It was only for a moment, but I noticed her face turning red.

'Good.'

It wasn't a bad reaction. I tested it out because I thought it would be better if I acted a bit more aggressively and it seemed to be working. Not only did I stay close to her, but I continued complimenting her. What Jung Ha-Yan needed right now was a huge amount of affection because she was no longer talking to herself nor did her eyes seem strange. At least when she was with me, her condition didn't look serious.

"Did you make the preparations to leave?" I asked her.

"I prepared everything, hehe," she answered and giggled.

"Oh, thanks. Let's head out."

"Okay."

"Oh, oppa wait… there's something I want to tell you," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Yeah?" I asked.

"Last time… about last time."

"Huh?"

"You know when we had our… fir… first, first kiss," she stuttered.

I remembered. There was a time when I kissed her in order to reassure her before meeting with Cha Hee-Ra.

"Back then…"

"…"

"You told me that you lo-loved me, right? That I was the only one for you, right?" she

asked.

“Yeah, I did say that,” I answered.

“It’s still… the same, right? You still love me, right?” she asked.

‘This is… ’

It was difficult to tell which answer was the right one, but since her eyes were telling me that she demanded an answer, I realized that I had reached a specific option. Generally, nodding would be the answer, but it was hard to tell whether that was really the answer. I was naturally worried that my answer could potentially change her nature. When I was calculating in my head, I heard her voice again, demanding an answer.

“You do love me, right?”

There was a sense of urgency in her eyes.

I nodded and spoke slowly. “Of course. I love you now and I’ll love you from now on.”

“Ah… that’s a relief,” she said.

“But… why are you asking all of a sudden?” I asked.

“It’s nothing,” she said.

She looked really happy, but I still wasn’t sure if my choice was the right answer since her nature hadn’t changed yet.

“I love you too, oppa,” she told me.

“Me too…”

CHAPTER 91
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (5)

All of a sudden, a change occurred to Jung Ha-Yan's status window.

[Nature - Corrupted Supporter]

I was so close to saying, 'Don't become corrupted like this… '

'That wasn't the answer.'

I instantly realized that telling Jung Ha-Yan that I loved her wasn't the answer, but the problem was that I couldn't choose the other options. It was because I didn't know what kind of reaction she would show the moment I told her that I didn't love her anymore. If both weren't the right answers, then going with the option that I knew the result would be a bit better because I could assume what was going to happen based on the current situation.

When I smiled while pretending like nothing was wrong, she smiled at me as well.

'I need to come up with a plan.'

As I mentioned earlier, I needed to think of a way to control Jung Ha-Yan on top of taking control of the dungeon. I didn't think about different options, but I instantly thought about the most effective method. I did consider staying away from her completely or excluding her from the party, but I believed that method should only be used as a last resort.

"I'm going to go to a meeting real quick, Ha-Yan. Make preparations with Deok-Gu and Miss Hee-Young," I told her.

"Okay, oppa!" she said.

The only time I could stay away from her was when I talked to the executive members. I guess I really was the last person to arrive because I noticed Hwang Jung-Yeon, Kim Hyun-Sung, and Lee Sang-Hee talking.

“Are you talking about a small statue?”

“Yes, it’s a statue,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“I confirmed that there were statues installed in certain areas and even though it was only for a moment, the ringing inside my head disappeared. It didn’t necessarily break the curse, but it was more like it had been suppressed for a moment…” he explained.

“I see, so does that mean certain areas are considered safe zones?”

“I’m not sure if the statues in the other areas have the same effect, but… I’m sure it’ll at least help calm our exhausted minds. Since it’s difficult for holy magic to have a big effect after being cursed, I think it’ll be best to utilize the statues as much as we can,” he suggested.

“That’s a relief. I was starting to feel that the cycle of the curse was getting shorter.”

“It’s a bit far from this place,” he told them.

When I nodded, I noticed the others greeting me. Based on their conversation, it seemed like Kim Hyun-Sung had found something. Basically, he found a safety zone that suppressed the effects of the curse.

‘Not bad.’

We would have eventually found the safety zone while taking control of the dungeon, but it was worth applauding him for finding one pretty early in the expedition.

“How’s party seven doing?”

I noticed Kim Hyun-Sung glancing at me. Since he had been out all this time, he wouldn’t know the condition of his party members.

“They do seem a bit unstable, but I think they’ll be fine for now. Miss Hee-Young doesn’t seem like she has been affected by the curse and it’s the same for me. It’s not

that I don't hear the voices at all though…" I answered.

"I see."

"I'm not sure about this, but it seems like the effect of the curse is based on one's intelligence stat," I added.

"Oh…"

"How's party two?"

"It seems like our vanguards have been affected more than the rearguards since their intelligence stats are lower and the cycle of the effects has been a bit quicker as well. I can't say that we're in a serious situation right now, but… if this condition lasts for three days to a week, I don't know what will happen…" Hwang Jung-Yeon answered.

"Still, it's a relief that we discovered certain areas that could be considered safe zones where we can safely rest. Please let the priests of each party know that they should focus their holy power on the vanguards more than the rearguards. It may not seem that effective, but it'll be better than not having anything at all. If you happen to find any other information, please let me know right away. It doesn't matter how trivial it is," Lee Sang-Hee said.

"Got it."

"We'll leave after everyone is done with the preparations. We'll do the same position as yesterday and have Mr. Hyun-Sung lead the search," she added.

"Okay."

Lee Sang-Hee explained our next course of action and we nodded in agreement. Her business was finished, but my business was just about to start.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, I'm going to speak with Miss Jung-Yeon for a moment and then head back," I told him.

"Oh… okay. I understand," he said.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked kind of confused, but Hwang Jung-Yeon looked a bit surprised. When I saw her nodding in front of me, I assumed that she already knew

what we were going to talk about since she seemed excited. A few moments later, Kim Hyun-Sung walked away and Hwang Jung-Yeon spoke with a curious expression. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine. How about you, Miss Jung-Yeon?” I asked.

“I’m fine too. I think having a high intelligence stat definitely affected the curse although when I look at you, I don’t really think that’s the case, Mr. Ki-Young,” she said.

“I just look okay on the outside,” I told her.

“I don’t think so. When we got cursed, you broke out of it pretty early. Even though everyone was looking at different things, it still hurt my pride a bit, hehe,” she giggled.

“Have you discovered anything else?” I asked.

“Oh, yes. I’ve been waiting since I don’t think it’s really the right time to bring it up, but I’m currently gathering data,” she answered.

“For example?”

“Like the timing of when we hear the voices… to be exact, we hear the voices every 10 minutes and 46 seconds and for every hour that passes, it shortens by 38 seconds. But when we’re not doing anything and resting, the effect slows down. Of course, it’s not definite since there are differences individually, but my body seems to react that way,” she explained.

“Ah, I guess having a good memory helped,” I complimented.

“It did, but I can’t say that I’m happy about being able to hear those bastards’ voices more vividly. By the way, what’s going on? Are you trying to keep your promise from last time?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“No, right now isn’t the best time. Deok-Gu is having a hard time and… we’re also in a dungeon,” I answered.

“Hehehe, despite that, it seems like you and Miss Ha-Yan have been relying on each other… how romantic,” she said.

“It’s honestly not romantic at all. I think it’s because of the curse,” I told her.

“But on the outside…”

“She looks fine,” I said, finishing her sentence.

“Are you saying that you can recognize even the tiniest bit of change since you two had spent a lot of time together?” she asked.

“Let’s just say that’s the case,” I told her.

“*Hm…* and the reason why you’re not telling Miss Lee Sang-Hee or Mr. Hyun-Sung is that…”

“It’s a problem I need to solve on my own,” I answered.

“I still think it’ll be better to tell them since the smallest variable can change the situation in a dungeon control. If Miss Ha-Yan isn’t feeling well, you two can leave the dungeon first,” she suggested.

“No, even if we leave this dungeon, there’s no guarantee that the curse will break…” I refused.

It could be more dangerous if we left, so being together with everyone was the better choice.

“At least you know about it… It’s like having insurance in case something happens,” I told her.

“It’s nice that you trust me, but I can’t say that I’m confident about it. Even though I’m not expressing it, I’m pretty stressed out right now. So what do you want me to do?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

There wasn’t a reason for me to hide in the bushes, so I immediately answered while looking at her.

“Are you able to cast an illusion spell, a hallucinogenic spell, or a spiritual spell?” I asked.

“*Hm…”*

"…"

"I can't cast a spiritual spell," she said.

'Oh.'

"But I can cast an illusion or hallucinogenic spell. A spiritual spell isn't impossible, but it's pretty complicated. You already know that don't you, Mr. Ki-Young?" she asked.

"Yes, I assumed it was a difficult spell," I answered.

"I think I have an idea as to what you're asking me to do… but it's not a simple task. Illusion and hallucinogenic spells aren't effective against people with high intelligence stats and even when a person has low intelligence stats, if their magic stats are high enough, they can resist it. It applies more to spiritual spells. No matter how hard a person tries to accept the spell, humans tend to instinctively try to push out anything that's invading their mind," she explained.

I knew it was going to be difficult, but hearing her say that it was impossible from the start made me lose a bit of hope. However, I knew very well that people like Hwang Jung-Yeon found joy in making the impossible, possible.

"It's true that it's impossible to do. It's definitely impossible…" she said.

"Will it make a difference if the person is cursed?" I asked.

"It'll still be difficult," she answered.

"What if you had a potion that could help? Or a catalyst…"

"Are you saying that I should cast the spell based on how you use your magic?" she asked.

"Yes. I also have some potions that I've been researching. I've been testing out a potion that involves a person's emotions. It didn't really work out very well, but… it wasn't bad. It doesn't actually mess with a person's emotions, but it'll provide a similar reaction," I explained.

"…"

“Is that possible?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. I’m not really sure, but… I guess it’s a combination of potion treatment and illusion spell. Using them at the same time might be effective. The potion will get rid of any barriers that humans instinctively have and… we’re in a situation where the mind is already weak because of the curse…” Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

I noticed how she kept mumbling. She looked excited as if she was thinking about the theory.

“If this ends up being successful, then dungeon control could become easier, but of course, we’ll need to do several tests… it’ll probably take at least a month…”

“I think it’ll be best if we skip all the trivial things and test it out immediately since we have a test subject already,” I said, interrupting her.

“Excuse me?” she asked.

“I think it’ll be best if it was done on me. It won’t harm my body… and since I created the potion, I know about it the best,” I answered.

“Oh…”

“What do you think?” I asked.

“I’m not sure, but I think it’ll be fun. We can talk about the theory while walking and we can do clinical trials whenever we’re resting. If any problems occur mentally…”

“That won’t happen,” I said, reassuring her.

I couldn’t guarantee it, but it was the right decision to lie because I was in a situation where I had to somewhat gamble. This test was necessary in order to maintain my relationship with Jung Ha-Yan, even though I knew very well that staying beside Hwang Jung-Yeon would create a bad influence on Jung Ha-Yan…

‘It’s part of the plan.’

After thinking about the bigger picture, this didn’t seem like such a bad choice.

“I’ll let Mr. Hyun-Sung know,” I told her.

“Excuse me?”

“That I’ll be moving with party two for the time being,” I answered.

“Yes, that’ll be best. Actually, I think it’ll be best to send one of my party members as your replacement since we have a lot to do right now. We should let the others know that we’re doing research about the dungeon. I’m not sure when the monsters will appear, but I’m sure we’ll be able to experiment freely until that time comes,” she explained.

“Okay.”

“Did you bring the catalyst?” she asked.

“Of course. I brought my alchemy kit, so don’t worry,” I answered.

“Three days. Let’s solve this within three days,” Hwang Jung-Yeon suggested.

“Let’s do it faster, if possible,” I requested.

“*Ugh…* the spell is difficult, but at least we have the supplies. If we don’t get a result through this, the magic scholars will probably start crying. I guess this would be our second experiment, right?” she asked.

“This time, you’ll be Dr. Hwang,” I told her.

“Okay, Assistant Lee. I look forward to your cooperation,” she said.

CHAPTER 92
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (6)

"How's the reaction?" Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

"I'm not sure…" I answered.

"Maybe this isn't it either… you sure there's nothing wrong with your body?" she asked.

"Yes, I seem fine on the outside. Even from the data that I used for the last trial, there weren't any physical issues, so you don't have to worry about that," I said, reassuring her.

"When did you have the time to do that…"

I used it when I was in the process of hiring workers while trying to recruit Sun Hee-Young to our party. I was able to achieve satisfactory results during that time, but since there were so many restraints, it was a test where I had to stop the research. I never imagined that it would come in handy at a place like this. It was as if that situation had prepared everything for us and the data that was in my head had finally become helpful.

"How about making the consistency thicker?" I asked.

"It's not good to put in a lot. Considering how I may use magic later on, this is an appropriate amount. If we do put in more, you know that it'll affect you physically, right?" she asked.

"I mean, if you think of it as using it to resist the curse, then it has to have an effect that'll surpass the curse's effects…"

"Are you trying to use poison to subdue the poison?"

"I don't think it's a bad idea to approach it that way," I answered.

“Looks like we’re back where we started,” she commented.

“Actually, we’re not. I think we’re pretty much ready, but…”

“The problem is you’re not sure, right?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“You need to rethink the formula. Looks like it’ll be difficult today too,” she said.

Exchanging opinions like this was effective. It was only yesterday that I felt like my head was in the clouds. I never thought that I would make this much progress in one day.

It was probably because of that reason that we got along better than I thought. This was something I felt long before I obtained my new job, but Hwang Jung-Yeon and I had a mutual relationship where we scratched each other’s backs. Of course, having a mutual relationship didn’t necessarily mean that our personalities matched. I was thinking more about our work efficiency. If I wasn’t good at calculating, then I could simply say that I wasn’t good at it since Hwang Jung-Yeon was a specialist in that department.

It was natural for me to receive a lot of help. I was sure that I helped her as well since she wasn’t good at being carefree. We were helping each other in many ways.

“By the way, is Miss Ha-Yan okay? She seemed really uncomfortable…” she asked.

“I still show my face from time to time at night, so keeping this much distance should be fine for now,” I answered.

“But still…”

“She hasn’t been acting strange yet,” I mentioned.

“Okay, whatever you say, Mr. Ki-Young… she seems fine on the outside, but I understand why you said that we needed to figure this out fast. My entire body feels numb because it feels like she’s been glaring at us more recently,” she said.

“I’m sorry. Like I mentioned before…”

“I know. I have to take action if something suddenly happens… As a virgin that has never dated a man before, I don’t know how I am suddenly involved in a catfight and getting blamed for it. I also feel like I’ve been labeled as a woman in an affair despite not having held a man’s hand once. I feel so wronged. Although, this feeling of being like the main character of a drama doesn’t seem all that bad…” she explained.

“*Ahem.*”

“But why does it have to be the woman who’s in an affair? I feel like even Mr. Deok-Gu is looking at me a bit strangely… once this is over, I want to be paid two to three times over,” she demanded.

“Yes. Once this is over, I’ll do all that I can to help you,” I told her.

“Don’t forget that now,” she said.

As she mentioned, the more time passed, the worse Jung Ha-Yan’s anxiety became. It wasn’t because I suddenly joined party two. The actual cause of it was that I was spending time with Hwang Jung-Yeon, but that was something I didn’t have to mention. Jung Ha-Yan was expressing her jealousy. Since she was in a situation where she had to be away from me in her current mental state, it felt like the curse’s effects had accelerated. Actually, it was to the point where I wasn’t sure whether it was the curse or her own thoughts. I wasn’t sure what she was thinking, but I think she was planning something out in her head. It was a fight between whether Jung Ha-Yan’s plan was going to be completed first or the research Hwang Jung-Yeon and I was doing was going to succeed first.

If I could completely focus on the research, I would have more results than now, but I had to invest time in managing whatever was remaining in her mental state. It would only be a matter of time until I fed her a stabilizer along with a potion, so this was really important. Even though what we were doing wasn’t going to completely cure her mental state, it would continuously weaken it while we weren’t done with our research.

‘The situation could get ugly if it happens unexpectedly.’

It was to lessen the side effects as much as possible.

Honestly, Jung Ha-Yan wasn’t the only person that was interfering with the new research. Since the goal of this expedition was rescue and not control, different

situations kept holding us back. After we informed the others that Hwang Jung-Yeon and I would be doing research on the dungeon, we were excluded from the majority of the small expeditions, but despite that, having to experiment while moving had put us at a big disadvantage. Even though the leader of party two, Hwang Jung-Yeon, was excluded from the majority of the expeditions, the rescue team was moving along without any issues. It was because they still hadn't encountered any monsters and with Kim Hyun-Sung's help, they were able to find hints and make progress.

Since I was focused on the research, I didn't hear any of the details about the progress of the dungeon control, but I couldn't deny the fact that they were making progress little by little.

'Of course… '

Not everything was going smoothly. Besides Jung Ha-Yan, the curse was affecting more and more people and there were some that started talking to themselves. I thought that the curse's effects had been delayed as much as possible thanks to Kim Hyun-Sung, but the side effects of staying in a dungeon for a long time were starting to show. Among them, Lee Sang-Hee's condition was a bit serious than the rest.

"I'm sorry."

What she saw under the curse's effects were the party members that entered this dungeon first. I didn't talk to her myself, but it was obvious that she felt anxious and impatient.

'We haven't found a survivor let alone a hint.'

It was possible that everyone was thinking the same thing—the majority of the party that came before us were dead. Anyway, despite the situation, the expedition group continued and the curse that was invading our minds was starting to affect me too.

"This can't be considered perfect. It's disappointing, Mr. Ki-Young," Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

"But it's somewhat effective. Even though I still hear the voices, the throbbing feeling in my head is gone. Just having that effect is…"

"It's progress, but… we could've perfected it if we had more time, so it's unfortunate," she sighed.

“Using it rather than being disappointed by it is more important,” I told her.

“You’re right. By the way, could you tell Miss Ha-Yan to stop glaring at us?” she asked.

“That’s not something I can control,” I answered.

“After experiencing it myself, it doesn’t feel that great… as expected, dramas and reality are different,” she commented.

“…”

“It’s more fun to take a step back and watch the situation from the outside,” she added.

“By the way, are you feeling better, Miss Jung-Yeon?” I asked.

“Well… it’s mentally tiring. Maybe it’s because I’m able to do research on something I’m really interested in that I feel a lot better. I’ve been seeing things lately though. How about you, Mr. Ki-Young?” she asked.

“I do, but… it’s nothing serious,” I answered.

“I guess it really is effective. Everyone looks worn out…” she commented.

More time passed and there weren’t any changes. The expedition group moved deeper into the dungeon, but we didn’t see any Undead or survivors. We were moving forward diligently, but it felt like we were stuck in the same maze. Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t look that anxious, but it was obvious that Lee Sang-Hee wasn’t feeling well.

“Miss Lee Sang-Hee, we’re at the safe zone.”

“W-We won’t spend the night here and will keep moving.”

“Excuse me?” the party asked.

“W-We already wasted a lot of time. The survivors could be in danger if we delay any more. We’ll take a break at the next zone,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

‘Here we go again.’

“But it’s already the second…”

“I’m sure there will be something in the next room. Yeah. I’m… sure of it.”

“You should take a break too, Master.”

“No, I’m fine. I know you’re all tired, but please hang on just a bit longer. After we find the survivors… yes. If we find the survivors…” Lee Sang-Hee said.

There may not be any survivors, no, I was certain that most of them were dead. If the Blue Guild’s party were already in this dungeon even before we arrived in Lindel, they must have gotten killed by the Undead already, killed themselves, or they could have killed each other.

“Please wait a bit longer. Just a little bit… we’ll move faster. A little faster…” she said.

“Oh…”

It was obvious when looking at the current situation. The expedition group leader was struggling because of the hallucination and auditory hallucinations. A few of the members looked frustrated and annoyed while others were having a hard time trying to maintain their mentality. The fact that Park Deok-Gu was quietly enduring all of this was commendable, but even Sun Hee-Young looked exhausted. Everyone was about to reach their limits.

‘She wants us to endure this for a few more months?’

It was impossible. It was the worst situation for all the party members, but to Jung Ha-Yan, this was the perfect situation and if she really wanted to execute her plan, this would be the perfect time.

“E-Everyone, please hang in just a little more,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“But we’ve reached our limits…”

“The guild members are dying inside,” she added.

“The rearguards are really struggling now, Miss Lee Sang-Hee.”

“…”

“Miss Lee Sang-Hee.”

That was when I realized that something wasn’t right.

- The curse…

‘Damn it.’

Everyone looked up at the same time. It was the same voice we heard the first time. It wasn’t Park Hye-Young or Jung Jin-Ho’s voice.

‘Round two?’

The curse’s effects were accelerating. If we were struck again in our current situation, not only would we be unable to rescue the party, but we wouldn’t even know whether we would survive or not. A few of the members could endure the second onslaught, but I was sure that the majority of the members would lose their minds.

“Please recite the holy shield spell,” Lee Sang-Hee requested.

“But…”

“It’ll be better than nothing. We need to hold it off as much as we can. Mages, please use as many shielding spells…”

The mages and priests used their spells, but this wasn’t a type of attack that could be blocked using magic.

While I was biting my lips, I couldn’t help but look at Jung Ha-Yan and of course, I saw her smiling brightly while looking at me. She wasn’t talking, but she seemed like she wanted to say something when I saw her opening her mouth.

‘I. Love. You?’

When Jung Ha-Yan seemed strange, I couldn’t help but immediately call out Hwang Jung-Yeon’s name.

‘Seriously?’

“Shit… Miss Jung-Yeon, please cast the spell now!”

I was going to do it. It may be a bit early and even if we were in this situation, I thought that it would be better to move fast.

‘Is it because of Hwang Jung-Yeon?’

I was sure that was it.

“Huh? What? But the defense spell…”

“Hurry!” I yelled.

“O-Okay! I-It’s really okay, right? It’s still…”

“Hurry up and cast it!” I yelled again.

There were screams everywhere, which caused an uproar in the dungeon. The vanguards were already getting affected by the curse.

After quickly drinking the potion I prepared, I started running toward Jung Ha-Yan.

“I knew it! You feel the same way as me!” Jung Ha-Yan said.

After welcoming me with a bright smile, I grabbed her hand, kissed her, and pushed the liquid that was inside my mouth into hers.

“I love *eup!*”

‘Shit.’

Considering how I was able to feel the flow of her mana in this situation, I guess she had made up her mind and through the hand that I was holding onto, I felt an unimaginable flow of mana. I wasn’t sure what kind of spell she was going to use, but I was certain that it wasn’t a defense spell. Just when I was praying that Hwang Jung-Yeon’s spell would be completed before Jung Ha-Yan’s, Jung Ha-Yan’s eyes started to get bigger.

‘Did it work?’

I wasn't sure yet. I could be seeing things because of the curse, but if Jung Ha-Yan wasn't cursed and Hwang Jung-Yeon's spell worked on her, then I was sure that I wasn't hallucinating.

'A crazy mage and a cursed shrine.'

This was the ending she wanted.

"Ahhhhhhhh!!!"

As she looked up while tears flowed out of her eyes, I knew for sure that she was looking at the situation I had prepared for her.

CHAPTER 93
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (7)

Together forever! We can be together forever.[1]

- That's right. We'll stay together forever.

A home just for the two of us.

- Yeah. No one will be able to interrupt us or trespass on our home. It's the result we wanted.

I wonder if oppa feels the same way.

- Of course. He told you that he loved you.

You're right. He did say that.

- It's dangerous outside.

That's true. There are too many people trying to take oppa from me even though everything that you're saying sounds dumb…

- Look at that woman. She looks like she's trying to flirt with oppa and oppa looks like he's in a difficult position. And what about the people trying to kill oppa? Think back to the time we were in the tutorial dungeon. Oppa is weak, oppa is weak!

- He needs our protection.

That's right.

- This is protection. To protect him, we have no choice but to do this. It's dangerous outside.

I activated the spell I was reciting.

'I have no choice.'

- Kill them all. Start with that woman. She tried to steal oppa.

But she's a high-ranked mage. Do you think it'll be okay?

- She'll never see it coming. We can target her when she's influenced by the curse.

That's the same for me too.

- We're fine because I'll protect you. You don't want to be influenced by the curse?

You're going to protect me?

- Yeah because I'm you and you're me. All you need to do is pierce through her head once. A simple spell should do it. It's important that you don't waste your mana.

Oh! I succeeded.

- Great, now who should we target next? That dumb woman looks good. Since her endurance is high, let's think of another idea.

What can we do? What about a corruption spell? Wait, that takes too long since I don't specialize in black magic. Let's do something else. How about pulling her head off? From the inside.

- That's a good idea. I don't think she'll notice us anyway, so that's really good. That's right. Just like that…

- You did it!

Hehe.

- Don't worry about the rest since they're all going to die anyway. The next is… Sun Hee-Young?

She went out with oppa every day, right?

- Yeah, she did.

Still…

- Don’t be weak. We don’t have a choice. Let’s get rid of that kid together with her.

I don’t want to.

- You can’t do that. Stop being weak. This is all to protect oppa so let’s give them a painless death.

Okay.

- Mr. Deok-Gu and Mr. Hyun-Sung…

I don’t want to kill them since oppa likes them. I think it’ll be best to make them sleep.

- Aren’t you worried? Kim Hyun-Sung is strong. What if she comes back to this place later? He could ask you to return oppa.

He can’t do that.

- Let’s kill him too.

I told you we can’t do that. Are you an idiot?

- You’re the idiot. We did well up until now and you’re going to give up now? We kill those two and it’s over.

No, I don’t want to do that. Especially Deok-Gu oppa since he helped me a lot.

- You’re going to regret it.

I think it'll be better to make them sleep and then we can send them out. We can’t do anything if they keep visiting, but I don’t want to kill them.

- You…

Taking oppa is the priority. I’m going to hide him in the deepest part so that no one will take him. Look at our oppa sleeping. Isn’t he cute and lovable?

- Yeah. But what if oppa tries to run away?

He won't. Oppa told us that he loves us.

- I think it'll be better to set up a safety device just in case.

Okay, that should be fine. Hehe. Oppa looks so cute when he's sleeping.

- Yeah, he's really cute. We need to hurry though. We have a lot to do.

That's right. I need to decorate our new home and we'll need a lot of stuff. Since oppa likes to study, I think it'll be good to create a study room for him. We need to make a shower room and I'll make it big s-so that we can take a shower together. The bed will be big and I need to make a bathroom too so I need to do my best.

- We also need a system where it'll kill anyone that trespasses our home. The people that are targeting oppa may come back so we'll create a golem and a chimera. We also need more Undead since the dungeon is empty. It'll be difficult, but we can do it if it's for oppa. This place will be our home. It'll be an unbreakable castle just for oppa and me.

* * *

Where's oppa?

- He just woke up. I don't think he ate today either…

Do you think he's okay? I'm really worried. He doesn't look okay. I wonder if he's sick. How many months has it been… wait… what if oppa wants to leave this place?

- That's possible.

He said something a few days ago. That he wanted to go outside…

- Don't fall for it. Never ever fall for it.

I don't like it when oppa isn't energetic. He doesn't even smile a lot these days.

- He'll understand someday. He'll understand that all of this was for him. It's dangerous outside. There were strange people that came into our house today. If oppa went outside, I'm sure he wouldn't be able to handle them. Do you want him to be taken away again?

I don't, but… I still don't like him looking sad.

- Then just use a spell that'll make him feel better. Oppa will feel better. And when he does, he'll be nicer to us and we can spend a happier time with him. We need to always make him smile.

Is that okay?

- It's all for oppa.

It's all for oppa. You're right. I should try it now.

- Great.

Oh, he smiled! You were right.

- I told you. Let's try another spell. How about a seduction spell?

But that wouldn't be oppa's true feelings…

- I think using it once in a while is okay… we've worked hard up until now, so think of it as rewarding ourselves. Okay?

Rewarding ourselves?

- Yeah. Rewarding ourselves. I think it'll be best to stay in this condition just for today. Think about how hard we worked to protect oppa… we killed everyone that came here every day and not only that but we also cleaned the surrounding areas too. Completely remodeling the dungeon was hard—we needed to create a chimera every day and we couldn't even sleep well the past few days because we were worried about oppa.

Right? But still…

- Just for one day.

Is that okay?

- Of course. Stop thinking about it and just do it.

“Th-Then, just for one day. One day…”

- Good job.

Ahhhhhh.

- Nice.

I’m happy, I’m so happy. I’m so, so happy.

“I’m happy. I’m so happy.”

- I was right. Aren’t you glad you did it?

Yeah, you were right.

* * *

What should I do? O-Oppa ran away.

- I knew he was going to do that.

How? How? Does he not like me anymore? I made him happy every day… I don’t know what went wrong.

- It could be because he drank the poison of the outside world.

But we’re inside the dungeon. There’s no way something outside would come in here.

- There are intruders every day. The dirty air around them has been tainting oppa’s mind.

We need to kill them all.

- Yeah.

I never imagined that he would suddenly run away like this. It’s all the intruders’ fault! Why won’t they leave us alone? I don’t know why they keep coming here and interrupting my time with oppa! I don’t know why! Won’t it be better if I left and killed them all? Lindel, I’ll kill everyone in Lindel.

- That’s a good idea, but people other than oppa are all bugs, so they're bound to come back here no matter many of them you kill.

Wh-What should I do?

- The air outside might’ve already affected oppa’s mind and curing it won’t be easy. Oppa won’t be able to escape the dungeon by himself… shouldn’t we do something temporary at least?

Like what?

- Let’s cut off his legs.

“We can’t. That’s nonsense. I don’t like it when he’s in pain.”

- You can do it without hurting him.

Without hurting him?

- Yeah, you just have to do it without hurting him. Cast a spell that’ll make him feel good and if you slowly take it off, oppa won’t feel anything. Of course, he’ll have a hard time walking around, but it’s not a bad idea, right? Since we’re always going to be by his side. Let’s make it so that he’ll have no choice but to rely on us.

But… that’s…

- What are you going to do if oppa leaves this place and runs off with another woman? Even the Red Mercenary Guild came here. That dumb Cha Hee-Ra might come back.

You’re right.

- Would you be able to endure it? If that situation really comes, don’t you think it’ll be difficult to bear? Cutting them off right now is the right thing to do.

I think you’re right. Yeah.

- Have you ever regretted listening to me?

Never, but…

- Trust me this time too. It's all going to work out.

* * *

Oppa tried to d-die. He bit his tongue! I don't like it. I'm really scared. What if oppa dies?

- But he didn't. We're fine.

But he tried to kill himself! I don't know why! Why did he do that? I told him every day that I loved him. Every day! We've been happy every day and no one from the outside world has visited us recently! We can now live a comfortable life!

- It's probably because the air from the outside world had already tainted him.

I don't want oppa to die. I don't want him to leave me and I don't like that he suddenly tried to kill himself. I don't like any of it!

- We can make it so that he doesn't die. Since we can't turn him into an Undead, let's try different tests. I'm sure there's a way to save him. There must be a way where we can live forever. Let's get a catalyst that'll regenerate the body and do surgery on oppa's body. It might be a bit painful, but we have no choice, and oppa will surely understand. It won't be easy, but we did well up until now, right? So we can do it this time too.

You… you're right. Let's do that. We should do that so this doesn't happen again.

- That's right. That's it.

"Oppa. Just bear with it even if it hurts. I'm doing all of this for you."

"*Ugh… ah… ah.*"

"You love me? Of course, I love you so much too, Oppa."

"*Ahh… ah…* do."

"You must never die. Never…"

"*Ahh…*"

“A lot of time passed. You look good even with white hair. *Ahhh…* that’s good. Oppa. Oppa!”

“*…Hae…*”

“I love you. I love you too.”

“…”

“Your hair has grown a lot. Research? Oh… of course, we’re going to do it today. It may be a bit painful, but I’m sure you’ll be able to handle it. When you’re in pain, I’m in pain too, Oppa. So let’s bear it together.”

“…”

“Just a little more, oppa. You can do it. Just hang in there. *Heuuuuk*… I love you. I love you.”

“*…Hae.*”

“*Ahhh…* no! No!”

“I…”

“Yes, Oppa. I’m right here.”

“You…”

“I love you. I love you too. So please don’t leave me. Please…”

“Resent you.”

“*Ah…*”

“I’m going to resent you and curse you for making me like this. Forever… no, I’m going to curse you even after I die. You didn’t give me love. You made me suffer and in the end, you made me this way. Look at my body. This is the result of your work and look at what’s around us! You’ve ruined everything.”

“*Ahhh!!!*”

“You destroyed everything. You ruined my love for you and my honesty. We could’ve been happier and we could’ve lived together happily. Even after I die… I won’t forget about you. I’ll curse you and curse you and curse you even more.”

“*Aaaahhhhhhhhh!*”

“I don’t love you anymore.”

“*Aaaahhhhhhhhhhh!* No! No! What should I do? Wh… What should I do now? Oppa? Oppa!”

- You can save him. You can still save him.

“St-Stop joking around! Stop it! It’s… It’s all because of you! All of it! You made him this way! Oppa…”

- I don’t know what you’re talking about…

“Die! Die! Just die!”

- You’re talking nonsense, dummy. You still don’t realize it?

“…”

- Look, I’m you. I told you that we were one and the same. You’re the one that did all of this, you idiot.

“That’s… not possible. That’s not possible.”

- Idi…

“…”

- ot…

Craaaaaack!

“*Aaaahhhhhhhhhh!*”

1. POV changed to Jung Ha-Yan. ☜

CHAPTER 94
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (8)

After experiencing a quarrel because of the sudden curse, I quickly looked at Jung Ha-Yan. Her condition looked more serious than I expected.

"Aaaahhh!"

'I'm sure we succeeded.'

It could be shocking to hear this, but this story had a good storyline even though it may be a bit difficult for her to endure.

'This is the answer.'

I was sure that this was the answer, but of course, Jung Ha-Yan probably wouldn't act out of place like this normally. Everyone continued being confused after entering this dungeon because of the curse's effects. Accepting it as shock therapy would make it more understandable.

Jung Ha-Yan's face was covered in tears and she was pulling out her messy hair. Everyone was pretty much the same, but Jung Ha-Yan's situation was obviously the worst.

At first, I thought grabbing her hand was all I had to do.

"No! No!"

'Her strength… '

After letting go of my hand, she tried to commit suicide, so I tried to pull her hand away from her as she tried to choke herself. She was coughing, but she was somewhat getting air into her lungs. After grabbing her hand tighter, I kissed her again and she slowly came back to her senses.

"*Ahhh…*"

"…"

"*Heuuuk.*"

Her confused expression changed into a surprised one and her eyes that were confirming my face were filled with tears.

"*Ahhh…* oppa… oppa…"

Naturally, she touched my face and my body. Of course, I expected this kind of reaction from her because I was decapitated in her hallucination.

"You're back," she told me.

"What…"

"I'm back. I'm back. *Heuuuuuk*… I'm back… I'm back," she said again.

"What are you talking about, Ha-Yan?"

"It's, it's nothing. Nothing. *Heuuuuk*… I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for being an idiot," she said, apologizing.

'Nice.'

"I don't know what… you're apologizing about… how's the curse? What did you see?" I asked.

"It's nothing. It wasn't a curse. It's all my fault. All of it. I'm sorry, Oppa. I'm sorry for acting on my own. *Heuuuk*… please don't hate me," she said, stuttering.

'There's no way I would hate you.'

I never had any hatred for Jung Ha-Yan, although I did think that this situation was too much, she only showed that side of herself because of the curse. I was actually thankful that I was able to plant a hallucination while her mind was being affected by the curse and it was to the point that I felt relieved that this chance came so fast.

Jung Ha-Yan was eventually going to cause trouble and even though I had no idea what would happen in the future, it was safe to assume that based on Jung Ha-Yan's

nature, the bomb in her was eventually going to explode. I couldn't help but smile at the fact that I was able to suppress that today.

'I also feel a sense of responsibility… '

I didn't have an unusual taste nor did I like being locked up, but I couldn't deny the fact that I felt guilt, compassion, and a slight interest in her.

- You're trying to rationalize yourself because you think you won't feel as guilty if you become close to her. You're trying to make yourself feel better by not abandoning her and showing that you have a conscience.

'That's possible.'

I also thought that the curse was affecting me too, but it didn't matter anymore. The heavy voice sounded like bullshit.

"I don't know what happened, but there's no reason for me to hate you because you're precious to me," I told her.

Half of it was true.

"*Wahhhhh…* you're the most precious to me too, Oppa. I like you the most," she cried out.

She buried her face which was covered in tears and snot into my chest.

"I'm here. I'm back. Thank you, god. Thank you very much, god. I'm so thankful," she said.

"You keep…"

"It's nothing. *Heuuuk*… oppa. Oppa. Did you get hurt anywhere? Your leg…"

"It's fine," I told her.

"*Heuuuuk*… and your arms are okay too. No injuries and no white hair. You're not in pain either. Your tongue is okay too. *Heuuuk*."

This was a situation that I didn't expect, but I did think that the hallucination I

created must have felt real…

'I didn't think that she'd return… '

If I knew that this was going to happen, then it would've been better to further develop the story. Like adding a scene where either Cha Hee-Ra or Lee Ji-Hye arrived to save me. It would've been difficult based on the story I created, but if I added a scene like that, then I was sure that Jung Ha-Yan's hostility toward them would have decreased by a lot.

'That's unfortunate.'

I thought that it would be better to explain it later.

"Oppa… *heuuuuuk…"*

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes… a little… a little bit."

"Then, can you wait for me a little bit? I think I need to check up on the others," I told her.

"Yes, of course, Oppa."

After lightly patting her head, her cheeks turned red. She remained still, but then she must have recalled what happened before she returned because her shoulders started to shake. The way she cried made her look like a pitiful puppy, which looked cute in my eyes.

'I shouldn't be like this… '

Anyway, seeing Jung Ha-Yan like this made me realize that not only did she come back to her senses, but it seemed like the curse was no longer as effective on her as before. I did think that it was possible based on the tests we had done, but I never imagined that it would be this effective. Of course, the counseling I did just for Jung Ha-Yan must have also played a part…

'This will definitely work on other people too… '

It was more than enough. Since it helped Jung Ha-Yan, who was in the worst condition, the others should be able to take it easier. If we used my potion and the effects of the spell properly, then these people would surely have peace of mind.

When I looked around, I noticed people that were still in a confused state. It was the same as the first time. Those that were screaming were slowly waking up and they looked around the place while talking to themselves. When I looked over at Hwang Jung-Yeon, who had returned to her senses, she was asking how it went.

'It was a success.'

I immediately took out my alchemy kit and when I drew a magic circle, Hwang Jung-Yeon came over to me while holding her head. Naturally, my attention was on her because she looked like a street potion peddler that was trying to sell me cheap potions.

"Mr. Ki-Young, what are you…"

"Please come over here one by one," I said, cutting her off.

"Excuse me?" she asked.

"Everyone else please wait for now and for the others, please come one by one," I said.

"First, *hiccup*… an explanation…"

"Miss Lee Sang-Hee, you're first."

"Master, please sit here."

"Now… let's see. Our sub-guild master. What kind of symptoms are you experiencing exactly?" I asked.

"Excuse me?" she asked.

"Oh. Since it could be personal, I think it'll be better to write it down and then submit it, Miss Jung-Yeon," I explained.

"Okay, I'll prepare it."

“Right now…”

“I’ve figured out a way to suppress the curse’s effects, Miss Lee Sang-Hee. Please relax and write down exactly the effects and the voices you’re hearing. If you’ve started hallucinating, please write down the details since that’ll help as well and if you’re also experiencing auditory hallucinations, please write down what you’ve been hearing,” I explained.

“Oh…”

“For people in party two, please line up and come this way. Please bring your writing equipment and wait,” I told the others.

“…”

Everyone looked like they understood, but it was kind of funny seeing them trying to get in line. It looked as if they had a few loose screws. It seemed like Nurse Hwang’s role was big, but despite that, she looked like she was enjoying herself.

“*Ohhh,* I see.”

“I am seeing the faces of people that I’ve killed so far and they keep whispering to me, saying that I’m going to die soon,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“I understand because I’m experiencing something similar as well. You’ll receive a potion prescription and the psychiatric treatment will be done later. I do see missing parts… *hm.* Oh, if you could describe how you killed them, that would be really helpful,” I said.

“*Oh,* that’s…”

“You can write down the things you don’t want to say out loud. It’ll be more effective if you write the details,” I told her.

“I guarantee it. It’ll be effective.” Hwang Jung-Yeon also spoke up.

“I understand, Miss Hwang Jung-Yeon,” she said.

As expected, the nurse’s role was important.

“Next up is… Miss Ga-Hyeon. Your younger brother was left by himself on Earth…”

“Yes…”

“It must’ve been difficult,” I said.

“*Heuk*.”

“I have a younger sister on Earth as well and of course, I’m worried about her, but… staying strong is important. I’m sure you’ll meet him someday. Right now… you seem to have a serious case of depression and even though I won’t be able to completely get rid of it, I can help you ease your mind a bit,” I explained.

“What should we do, Mr. Ki-Young?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“The 14th potion that’s in my bag should work, Miss Jung-Yeon. We’ll immediately perform the psychiatric treatment. We can immediately treat Miss Ga-Hyeon, so please prepare the spell,” I told her.

“Okay.”

Her nature was meek idealist, so I was sure that the potion would be effective on her. Based on her nature, hallucination, and the type of auditory hallucination she was experiencing, it was easier to treat her.

‘After having a beautiful reunion with her brother, we’ll have him tell her to be strong and to live on.’

I was sure that being told to survive so that they could meet again in the future would be effective. There had to be a few touching moments… and since her hobby was reading, I could add in a bit of fantasy.

‘I think it’ll be effective if I make her brother and the curse’s voice fight each other.’

Obviously, my current actions couldn’t be seen as a medical practice. It was more like a fraud under the guise of counseling. It didn’t treat them completely and it didn’t make them stop seeing or hearing hallucinations. All I did was insert an antibiotic into a contaminated mind, but it was effective. A human’s mind was weak, yet strong. Our minds tend to break easily at these types of curses, but when hope was present, we would obtain the courage to stand back up. I believe that we would be able to

overcome our stress and resist the voices.

For that woman, it was her younger brother. As for that woman that had the same symptoms as me, it was her low self-esteem. For Jung Ha-Yan, my existence alone was her strength.

'Good, good.'

It felt like everything was going well and of course, I didn't explain anything about this to Kim Hyun-Sung. It was natural for him to be surprised by me suddenly treating everyone and his mouth opened wide when he saw people feeling a lot better after receiving psychiatric treatment from Hwang Jung-Yeon. Basically, Kim Hyun-Sung had never imagined that we could capture a dungeon through this method. I was sure that this seemed ridiculous from the regressor's point of view because he probably had his own control plan. He probably had a way of dealing with this curse and was in the process of putting it to action, but even if our methods were different, as long as our goal was the same, it didn't matter. He must have understood that too because he nodded in appreciation.

"I've come ba… thank you very much, god. Thank you for helping me come back to my senses. Really… *heuuuuk*…"

But I could see that he was looking at Jung Ha-Yan with a serious expression when she was mumbling to herself.

'She's not a regressor, Hyun-Sung.'

I thought that it would be better to explain it to him in private after I was done treating everyone.

CHAPTER 95
LET'S STAY TOGETHER FOREVER (9)

"How do you feel, Miss Ga-Hyeon?" I asked.

"I think I feel better. I can still hear the voice, but I don't have a headache and I'm not mentally tired anymore. How could this…" she answered.

'It's all thanks to Miss Jung-Yeon.'

I wasn't going to say this kind of bullshit because I thought that it wasn't a bad idea to increase my worth. Since it was difficult for me to leave a good impression when it came to fights, I had to act like I was competent in other things.

"What kind of spell did you use?" she asked.

"Hahaha. It's a bit different from a complete spell. Did you know? The brain is made up of associative neurons and is responsible for handling the stimulation and processing and that's why medically, the brain is classified as the central nervous system," I explained.

"Excuse me? That's…"

Park Ga-Hyeon looked at me as if she was asking what I was talking about and honestly, I didn't know what I was saying either. I didn't know shit about the brain and I wasn't an expert in psychology, but I noticed everyone's expression changing as they were looking at me. From the beginning, it seemed that they had overestimated me, but when I mentioned something that only an expert would know, their eyes widened.

"The central nervous system has a different metabolism from the other organs. In order to create adenosine triphosphate… we need to give it oxygen…" I explained.

There probably weren't that many people in all of Korea that had this kind of knowledge and even if there were some brain experts, there wouldn't be anyone that would understand what I was saying because I was currently talking nonsense.

'It's not like anyone worked at a brain science laboratory either… '

Even if someone understood, magic and alchemy knowledge was a field where I developed. It was basically a blind squirrel finding a nut, but this was the best environment to lie in.

"Oh, I guess my explanation was too difficult," I added.

"Oh… it's fine," she said.

"Basically, even when this type of curse or magic enters us in a way that we're unsure of, in the end, it's all related to the brain. Regardless of whether it's magic, alchemy, black magic, or holy magic, it's basically messing with the brain," I said.

"*Ahh.*"

"You can think of it as your brain being delusional and that's why you're experiencing hallucinations. Of course, it's impossible for me to fix that hallucination, but I can use an antibiotic for it," I told her.

"What kind…"

"It's the ability to recognize the fact that what we're seeing and hearing isn't reality. The human body is truly interesting. Of course, this isn't something that can be cured with just a potion and the study of magic is a lot more complicated than people think. If I were to explain it in alchemy terms…"

"Ohh… I-I see," she said.

I saw people nodding, but no one understood what I was saying.

From the start…

'I even have no idea what I am talking about, so how could they?'

Even if a brain expert came, they wouldn't understand what I was saying. I was certain that people like Hwang Jung-Yeon and Jung Ha-Yan would ask annoying questions, but as long as I gave them a vague answer, I believe that they would take that and come up with their own answer.

'This is great.'

It was to the point that I could hear my reputation improving. When I first visited the guild, I never imagined that I would be in this situation.

"At first, I thought the executives were crazy for bringing in an alchemist at that price… but seeing you now, y-you really are a genius. *Sigh*… what did you do back on Earth…"

'Genius my ass.'

A fraudster would be a better description.

"I didn't do anything particularly amazing," I answered.

"Did you work at a lab or…"

"Well, I guess you could say that I did something similar. It's a bit difficult to explain the details," I said.

Of course, it was a lie.

"Thank you very much. I'm relieved that you're here with us, Mr. Ki-Young. I thought a genius only appeared in media, but having an actual genius like you next to me is very interesting," Park Ga-Hyeon said.

"Hahaha, you're embarrassing me. I'm just knowledgeable," I told her.

"I think you're the smartest person I've met so far," she complimented me.

It felt like this woman named Park Ga-Hyeon was unknowingly trying to show interest in me. We both had young siblings we left on Earth and it seemed like she was interested in smart men, but of course, I couldn't accept her feelings. It was all because I remembered Jung Ha-Yan's face and the way she bit her lips and gritted her teeth.

'She hasn't been completely cured yet.'

No matter what kind of treatment I gave for that obsessive side of hers, I wasn't sure if she would ever get fixed.

“Stop it. You’re embarrassing me in front of Miss Jung-Yeon,” I said.

“Ah no, no. I simply have a good memory.”

Basically, these people started labeling me as a genius alchemist that was born every 10,000 years.

“The alchemists I met before weren’t like you…” she mentioned.

“I’m sure there are alchemists all over Lindel that are smarter than me. The only difference is that they’re not getting the support they need and I just had a better start. Actually, it’s all thanks to the Blue Guild,” I explained.

“You’re even modest…”

It wasn't modesty, it was the truth. Even though there could be a few idiots among them, there were most likely one or two that were noticeably talented. But no matter how many times I said this, the image they had of me was already ingrained into their minds.

‘Lee Ki-Young, the genius alchemist given to us by god.’

This was certainly the image they had of me now. Humans usually get jealous of the people who were good at the things they could understand, but on the other hand, when a person accomplished something incomprehensible to them, then they would look at that person with respect. To them, they couldn’t understand the things that I was doing.

Once we were done with the dungeon, I was sure that there would be many opportunities for me to become an influential figure in the Blue Guild since Lee Sang-Hee was starting to lose her power in the guild. Lee Sang-Hee wasn’t the type to be obsessed with power. She had a sense of responsibility and since she was feeling pressured, she seemed happy about the current situation. Of course, I was certain that she felt really ashamed for showing an unreasonable side of her because of the curse.

‘I almost killed all the guild members.’

Or…

'I can't do this.'

These were probably what she was thinking right now.

While resting, I noticed her talking a lot to Kim Hyun-Sung and the times when she suffered alone became longer.

I would say this again, but people usually respected those that were able to achieve something incomprehensible. They showed that reaction to me, but it was obvious who they were going to show that same respect to during the dungeon expedition. I became curious as to what our regressor was going to do next.

It happened when we were taking a break.

"I'm really sorry for all I've done."

"*Ah…*"

"Even if I was influenced by the curse, I should've kept my head cool, but I put all of you in danger. I have no excuse for it," Lee Sang-Hee said.

'Nice.'

It was Lee Sang-Hee that spoke up. I knew I liked her personality. Even though there wasn't a reason for her to apologize, she bowed.

"Starting now, we'll change the route of the party. I believe taking control of the dungeon is more important than rescuing the survivors, so after we're done taking control, we'll recover any corpses and rescue survivors that we find," she said.

'Finally.'

It was a very reasonable decision. It wasn't worth it to kill the living just to save the dead. The order was wrong, but there was an important meaning behind Lee Sang-Hee's words.

"However…"

"We won't stop our search for the survivors. We'll change the formation so that we can move faster than we did before," she added.

“Okay.”

“Mr. Hyun-Sung will take the lead.”

“I’ll do my best,” he said.

I guess Kim Hyun-Sung gave Lee Sang-Hee a hard time or he must have thought that this was the right time to make a move.

No one was affected by the curse anymore. I did kind of feel bad for Kim Hyun-Sung when I thought about how hard he must have worked in trying to break the curse by himself, but I thought that he was actually happy about how it was resolved because it was one less thing he had to worry about.

The way he got up slowly and put away his sword was impressive. He gave off an overwhelming feeling.

‘Overpowering?’

It wasn’t a threatening mood. When he started walking, the others started to stand up as well and it was to the point that it felt like the expedition members were possessed by something.

‘That’s how it’s done.’

He was someone that you could call an ideal leader and I was sure that I wasn’t the only one that thought that way. Lee Sang-Hee was even staring at him absent-mindedly. Kim Hyun-Sung was an assertive person. From the beginning, he made the decision to come to this dungeon on his own and disregarded the party’s opinion. He would accomplish whatever he thought was right and only focused on his goals.

‘This is the right path. Let’s go together.’

It felt like that was what he was saying and he had this charm that made you want to follow him. Even though I didn’t know shit about monarchy, anyone could tell that Kim Hyun-Sung was an ideal monarch. He may be lacking when it came to ruling people, but as a leader, he was the most impressive out of everyone that I had seen so far.

“Let’s go.”

After saying that, we started walking. Everyone got up and immediately followed behind him. Kim Hyun-Sung slowly started to walk faster and the other members did the same. He ignored forked roads and didn't bother searching the rooms. The way he continued moving on the wide path made him seem very reliable. He walked as if he didn't think about the monsters or the fact that could be hidden traps or the Undead. It wasn't that he was confident about dealing with unexpected situations. It felt like his only goal was simply finding a path.

'Maybe there aren't any monsters.'

It only took an instant for me to think of the possibility that there weren't any other monsters here. Just like its name Cursed Shrine, it could be a type of dungeon that simply used curses against invaders and if my assumption was correct, then it was obvious where Kim Hyun-Sung was currently heading to. It was the mage who was the owner of this place and the one that had cursed us.

The more we walked, the more the environment started to change little by little. We did experience a few curses on the way, but no one was really affected by them. It was proof that the potion was working well.

"There aren't any… Undead."

"I'm sure that was written in the report…"

"There's a good chance that they saw the Undead because of the curse. I'm not completely sure just yet, but I think it's safe to assume that it's the case," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Still, please don't put your guard down," Lee Sang-Hee added.

"Okay."

We found corpses while walking. They were former members of the Blue Guild. I didn't know exactly how they died, but I had an idea. They either took their own lives or they could have killed each other. During this, Lee Sang-Hee seemed a bit confused, but she didn't have any problem continuing the expedition.

After walking farther in, we saw a small door that was decorated in a very unsophisticated way. When the door slowly opened, we saw a woman sitting on a chair. She had a pale face and her eyes were closed. The moment we saw her, new

information appeared on the status window.

[You have encountered Saint Juliena, the owner of the epic-ranked dungeon, Cursed Shrine, and the one casting the curses. The quest will be activated.]

[Epic-Ranked Dungeon Forced Quest will be activated.]

[Epic-Ranked Quest - Defeat Juliena (0/1)]

We reached the end.

CHAPTER 96
JULIENA (1)

A disturbing voice filled the room.

- Ahh…

I wasn't sure why, but my legs started shaking. The dungeon boss that we saw at the rare-ranked dungeon, Garden of Horror, couldn't really be considered a dungeon boss. The owner of that garden had a large frame and even though it had a recovery ability, it wasn't enough to handle the party's attacks.

But the woman that was in front of us was different. I was ignorant, but even I could tell that she wasn't an easy opponent. On the outside, she looked like a saint based on the saint uniform she was wearing, but the mood she gave off was different. My instincts were overwhelmed. I realized that she was a predator and I was prey. That was the moment where I missed having Kim Hyun-Sung behind me

'Hyun-Sung… you're okay, right?'

- Ahh… Gedric… my Gedric! You finally came to see me…

'What the hell is she talking about?'

- You finally found me. My lovely Gedric!

After her neck twisted in a strange way, she extended her hand out toward us. I did think for a moment whether I should pretend to be Gedric, but taking the lead in a place like this was dangerous. Quietly waiting with the other rearguards was the best.

'Is she blind?'

It was the moment when Kim Hyun-Sung took a step forward.

- Ahhhhh…

‘…’

- You aren’t Gedric. You’re not him.

After frowning, she opened her eyes. I didn’t think her eyes were going to be normal, but the eyes inside her eyelids were just pitch-black darkness. I wasn’t sure if her eyes had been gouged or if I just couldn’t see them, but it felt like I was going to get sucked into the abyss-like darkness. Maybe it was because I was rejecting her mentally, but I had goosebumps on my back.

‘Da… ’

- You’re not him. Not him!

The floor started shaking and as things started to crumble, the inside of the dungeon trembled. A strange feeling that wasn’t magic spread all over the place and because of the ringing in her voice, I couldn’t help but cover my ears with my hands. When blood was about to spill out from her mouth, I saw a curtain that covered the entire expedition group. Sun Hee-Young was using her holy magic to block the energy.

- You’re not him!

“Let’s prepare to fight. Mages will cast spells and the priests should continue to maintain their holy magic. It’s a monster I can’t aggro, so we’ll go about it as defensively as possible. It’ll be a long fight,” Kim Hyun-Sung declared.

“Okay.”

Lee Sang-Hee was calmer than I thought. She grabbed a large shield, covering the rear. She was reliable. When they started reciting their spells, magic started to appear everywhere. It was the job of the vanguards to buy time until the mages were done casting and of course, we couldn’t just sit by and watch either. With Kim Hyun-Sung in the lead, a few of the members started charging toward Juliena.

‘Hang in there, Kim Hyun-Sung.’

An energy that couldn’t be labeled as magic or holy magic started to appear everywhere and it was obvious who it belonged to.

‘Juliena.’

“Please prepare a defensive spell.”

- You dirty bastards… how dare you, dirty bastards! You dare trespass this place… this place!

Craaaack!

The way a black sphere started scratching the floor and charged toward us was a sight to see. Seeing an unknown energy come toward me as if it was going to swallow everything wasn’t a nice sight. At some point, I saw Lee Sang-Hee lifting her shield and blocking the heavy attack. Even though she managed to block it, it didn’t seem like it had been easy. I noticed holy magic flowing into the frowning Lee Sang-Hee.

‘This isn’t easy… ’

It was a bit different from the monsters we had hunted so far. The boss monster in the garden was focused on the vanguards, but Juliena wasn’t focused on a certain target. She was basically moving around like a crazy woman. In order to protect the rearguards whose defenses were weak, the vanguards had no choice but to stick with us, which made this woman a difficult opponent to deal with.

The time to cast spells became longer. Since it was going to be a long fight, the tanks had to be a bit more alert so that no harm would come to the priests. It was difficult to expect the archers, whose agility stats were high, to help with other things. When Jung Ha-Yan and Hwang Jung-Yeon opened their mouths, a spell containing a lot of mana appeared. It looked like it instantly enveloped the crazy woman, but the black sphere started to wrap around her body again.

That was when I activated the spell that I had been reciting.

“…!”

A large arm appeared in thin air and fell on top of Juliena, who was inside the black sphere. The large arm seemed as if it was going to crush her.

Craaaack!

The surprised expression on the party members’ faces only lasted for a moment. The dust disappeared and Juliena looked at us.

- How… dare you!

My magic was categorized into physical magic and I wasn't sure if that was the reason, but it felt like it did some damage to her; however, that wasn't really good news.

'Well, shit.'

I wasn't sure if it was a coincidence, but it felt like the black sphere fell in the area that I was in and an unknown energy kept falling. Kim Hyun-Sung also couldn't attack her easily in case the rearguards got hurt, so all he could do was block with his sword. I thought that maybe he would have an easier time hunting if we weren't here.

'Are all epic-ranked dungeons like this?'

I didn't think that it was going to be easy, but it was harder than I thought. I heard rumbling from all over the place. The entire dungeon was shaking and the floor started to open up.

'It won't be enough with Deok-Gu alone.'

That was probably the reason why Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't able to move as easily as he could if he was alone. Lee Sang-Hee was definitely doing her part, but since Park Deok-Gu's magic was low and he lacked resistance, he wasn't any different from us. He was doing his best, but all he could do was block small attacks. He was only able to endure so far because Juliena hadn't activated a curse just yet. At first, I thought that there were restrictions or cooldowns because it wasn't a normal skill that could be countered with holy magic or magic, but I guess that it was a skill that she couldn't use more often. If we started hallucinating during this time, we could be in even more danger.

I had to make a choice. I wanted to make a decision that would put us in less danger and in the end, I couldn't help but realize the fact that opening my mouth was the most reasonable method.

"*Ohhh,* my Juliena!"

Funny enough, I saw her flinching.

- Ge-Gedric?

When she heard my voice in the middle of the fight, the fight stopped. The members looked at me as if they were asking what I was doing, but I didn't need to answer them because they would soon find out.

"Juliena! My Juliena!"

- Gedric! Ohh, you're here, Gedric! You've come back to me.

"Juliena! I've been looking for you for eons! For this shrine!"

- Gedric, you've finally…

"Juliena!"

- N-No. You're not Gedric.

"…!"

'Damn it.'

"So much time has passed, Juliena. Unlike you whose tied to this shrine, I've experienced many changes that I can't even begin to count. My speech, my presence, everything about me changed since back then," I said.

- No, you're not my Gedric.

"Juliena! Juliena, my love!"

- You're not Gedric!

"Juliena, I may have changed, but I still remembered that day. Juliena, I've always kept the memories with you in this body."

- Ah…

"Those precious memories…"

- Ged… ric?

I wasn't sure what that day was, but she must have thought of something since black tears started to flow out of her empty eyes, which was a grotesque sight. I frowned for a moment, but I couldn't let her notice my voice. I thought that flirting with her was the best thing to do and if she demanded an explanation, then of course I would get caught.

- That day, you mean…

I got worried because it felt like she was going to ask again.

"We… *aaaaack*! Juliena!"

- Gedrick!

"They're oppressing me, Juliena! *Aaaaack*!"

Lee Sang-Hee, Park Deok-Gu, and Sun Hee-Young widened their eyes and looked at me incredulously, while Jung Ha-Yan looked jealous.

'Everyone is so… '

…Slow-witted. It was to the point that I missed Lee Ji-Hye, who was probably working hard on the thing I asked her to do. When I kept signaling Hwang Jung-Yeon, who was one of the smarter ones, I saw her nodding, but…

"Foolish Juliena! You're foolish, Juliena! W-W-We captured your love, Gedric!" Hwang Jung-Yeon yelled.

'Her acting's so awkward… '

I felt ridiculous for having a slight expectation for her because she was obsessed with dramas. I started to worry that Juliena would change her mind because of Hwang Jung-Yeon's acting. I guess even Hwang Jung-Yeon was embarrassed because her cheeks turned red. Thankfully, Juliena didn't become suspicious of her acting.

"Juliena! Please don't save me. Juliena! Run right now… *ack*, they…" I said.

- Gedric!

"*Gah*… run away! Juliena!" I yelled.

- How dare you! How dare you! My Gedric!

I didn't really care about Gedric or whatever his name was, but using him was more effective than I thought. Of course, she may still be suspicious of me, but that suspicion wouldn't last long anyway since the Gedric she had been waiting for so long was about to die. It was natural for her to react in this manner.

'The problem is that she's going crazy… '

She wasn't going to do anything crazy like sending off the energy toward the rearguards because her love, Gedric, was currently held captive there.

Unlike the others who were dumbfounded and were still trying to figure out the situation, Kim Hyun-Sung immediately tried to rush toward Juliena and I saw him swinging his sword toward her. He wasn't at the level where he could actively move around in an epic-ranked dungeon and honestly, saying that he was still growing was the right description. But the way Kim Hyun-Sung fought her as Juliena kept trying to charge toward us was impressive. Using the sword he was wielding, he blocked all the dark energy that was flying from all over the place and despite the fact that her range of attack was limited, Juliena kept attacking Kim Hyun-Sung who was in her way.

Craaaack, crack!

Not only did the same sound fill the room, but they were exchanging attacks that were beyond my understanding.

'Huh… '

Kim Hyun-Sung stretched his sword out, but it got stuck in the black energy. Juliena's tentacle-like black energy struck Kim Hyun-Sung, but our regressor had no problem blocking it.

Not only were our party members amazed by the impressive battle, but the other party members of the Blue Guild also stared at this scene with their mouths agape. They found it difficult to determine how they should enter the battle.

- You little pest… move aside this instant!

"…"

- Gedric! Gedric!

CHAPTER 97
JULIENA (2)

The fight was getting more intense. Juliena's performance was understandable since she was the original owner of the epic-ranked dungeon, but the swordsmanship Kim Hyun-Sung was showing was impressive as well. It was to the point that the room we were currently in started to change little by little.

- Move this instant!

Boom!

Craaaaack!

It seemed like they were having an even match, but Kim Hyun-Sung honestly had the upper hand.

- Juliena!

"*Ahhhhh!*"

- Gedric!

It was because unlike Kim Hyun-Sung who fought with all he had, Juliena was fighting while her weakness, Gedric, was revealed. I wasn't sure what kind of person Gedric was to her, but I was certain that he was precious enough for her to throw away her life in a place like this and since he was being held hostage, it was natural for her to be unable to show her true powers. Every time I screamed or called out her name, I noticed her getting agitated.

We could finish the fight a lot easier than now. The moment these assailants started to threaten her precious Gedric, Juliena was unable to use her powers to the fullest, but the people that were watching the fight didn't seem like they had thought about that.

'No.'

I didn't need to go that far. Right now, Kim Hyun-Sung wanted to show his power to the remaining members of the Blue Guild. He was biting down his lips so I knew he was being honest about this fight.

Juliena was that strong and the black tentacles around her were now stretched in different directions as they tried to tie Kim Hyun-Sung up. It felt like I was watching a stunt and it was to the point that I wondered if they had choreographed this before because he would either sidestep to avoid the tentacles or cut them off. Every time he swung his sword, the tentacles would be severed and attacks would land on the spot where Kim Hyun-Sung dodged.

Of course, Juliena wasn't an easy opponent. It felt like I was watching my superiors fight. Out of the people that I knew, the only person that would be able to fight like that was probably Cha Hee-Ra. Even Lee Sang-Hee, who was the strongest person here, was watching Kim Hyun-Sung as if she was possessed.

As I watched Juliena fighting desperately, I thought about whether I could use her for something, but…

'It's too dangerous.'

If I got caught, I'd immediately be kicked out. Not only me, but the people around me would all get hurt and I wasn't the type that enjoyed gambling. This wasn't the right time to gamble.

- Wait a little longer, Gedric. Just a little bit!

I was really satisfied with the current situation, but the one thing that bothered me was the fact that it seemed like we were the villains here. I felt how desperate the eyeless Juliena was. She looked so desperate that I began to feel bothered. The saint was struggling in order to save Gedric who had been captured by the villains, but I didn't feel sympathy for her.

Juliena, someone who looked like she had been swallowed by madness, was the owner of this dungeon that had killed many people. And truthfully, our party was in danger of dying as well. If this dungeon hadn't been discovered, then more people would have died. Considering the fact that we were the first ones to suddenly trespass this dungeon, there was no excuse… but I didn't want to quarrel with the monster that was on the same level as Kim Hyun-Sung.

- You annoying fly!

"…"

- Darkness shall consume you.

A black inverted cross appeared in the sky. It fell toward Kim Hyun-Sung, but he swung his sword while staying in place.

Boom!

Crack!

Craaaack!

'He's strong.'

I stood there in awe as I watched him cut up the large, black cross that was bigger than him. Before I knew it, I was watching with my mouth open.

- Darkness shall consume you!

Crack! Boom!

'Huh… '

Kim Hyun-Sung's expression was what confused me. The smile on his face showed that he was enjoying this situation.

Crack!

This could be a way for him to test out his strength. Of course, there was nothing he could do about the difference in stats and even though injuries started to appear on his body, Kim Hyun-Sung looked as if he was satisfied with his current condition.

'His average isn't even 80 and yet he's able to perform like that… '

- Move right now! Fine! Cursed sword!

A sword dropped above the cursed saint that had a contorted face. It wasn't Kim

Hyun-Sung's sword.

'What part of her makes her a saint?'

Actually…

'What kind of fight is this?'

It was better to describe their fight as a nonstandard, out-of-the-box fight. I personally didn't like that description, but there wasn't any other word that I could use to describe this fight. Juliena looked like she was in phase two and as she grabbed the sword, she charged toward Kim Hyun-Sung again. I guess it was difficult to fight her head-on because he started pushing her sword away and we started feeling the aftermath of it.

Both Park Deok-Gu and Lee Sang-Hee were using their shields to protect us and the magic that was protecting Kim Hyun-Sung, no, us, continued to envelop us.

'Can he win?'

I was worried about who was going to win. I was certain that Kim Hyun-Sung was going to win, but I was getting a bit worried by the increasing number of injuries on his body. Even though we kept using holy magic on him, he was still getting injuries, so I thought that maybe the worst situation was about to arrive.

'Should I trust him?'

I didn't think that was all Kim Hyun-Sung had and I was certain that he was hiding a thing or two, but I was starting to worry that he was being overconfident.

- Get crushed by the darkness!

Juliena raised her sword and Kim Hyun-Sung also focused his magic on his sword.

'This might be it.'

I didn't know about the fight, but there was a certain atmosphere. When the swords filled with power clashed, I couldn't help but scream.

"Juliena!"

Even while swinging her sword, she turned her head to where the voice came from. Kim Hyun-Sung forced Juliena's sword which contained great energy out of her hand and the cursed sword flew into the air.

When I looked at her closely to figure out the situation, Kim Hyun-Sung had already stabbed her stomach.

- Ged… ric.

'I feel like trash… '

I had done a lot of shitty things so far, but this was the first time that I felt this way about a dungeon boss monster. It was probably because I saw her reaching her hand out toward me while she was on the floor.

- Gedric…

As her body slowly disappeared, I saw the expedition members staring at Kim Hyun-Sung in a daze. When I pushed back the disturbing feeling, an unknown energy spread everywhere. I did flinch for a moment, but my mind felt lighter. After that, I realized that we had successfully taken control of the dungeon.

[The Epic-Ranked Force Quest has been completed.]

[Epic-Ranked Quest - Defeat Juliena (1/1)]

[As a reward, four stat points will be given randomly.]

'It's over.'

Naturally, everyone ran over to Kim Hyun-Sung who was quietly catching his breath and was about to pass out. During that time, we heard a very loud noise.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, are you okay?"

"Ho… How did you…"

“Mr. Hyun-Sung!”

“Oh, I’m fine,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Of course, everyone checked the condition of his body, but the murmuring started to get louder.

“*Huh…”*

“No… way…”

“I knew it was going to be difficult, but I never imagined this.”

“It might’ve been a dungeon that was about to advance in rank or it was probably downgraded. This is my first time experiencing this as well, so I have no way of explaining it,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“Whatever happened, it’s good fortune to the guild.”

For a moment, I didn’t really understand what they were saying, but after looking at the sword that was on the ground, I realized what they were talking about.

[Cursed Sword - Legendary Rank]

‘Huh… ’

It was faint, but an orange light kept flashing.

‘Amazing… ’

I think I knew why Kim Hyun-Sung wanted to come to this dungeon.

‘Was it because of this?’

A legendary-ranked item. There weren’t many weapons on this continent that had the same rank as this one. So far, a total of six legendary-ranked items had been

confirmed, but I was sure that there were more players that were actually using one. Of course, it shouldn't be more than 10. What made it even more amazing was that the drop rate of legendary weapons was very low even in legendary-ranked dungeons, however one had dropped right in this very dungeon. If Kim Hyun-Sung knew that he could obtain this sword in this dungeon, then it was understandable for him to go out of his way to get this.

The word legendary carried an important meaning on this continent. Legendary dungeon, legendary job, legendary item, legendary quest, legendary raid monster. Everyone on this continent always hoped that they would find one of these and the reason why this place suddenly became noisy was because of that reason. It wouldn't be strange if they started fighting over who would keep the sword, however, the owner was already decided. I was certain that everyone knew to whom this sword would belong. I thought that it wouldn't be bad to compliment him, so I spoke quietly.

"I never imagined that you would be able to defeat Juliena one on one."

"I could have died if it weren't for you Mr. Ki-Young. Thank you very much," he replied.

As expected, since he accepted the fact that he played a big part in this fight, I guess he really wanted that sword. It was natural for him to feel that way. Just like how I wanted a good alchemy kit, he would want a nice sword.

There wasn't a reason to discuss who would be the owner of the sword. No matter how you looked at it, Kim Hyun-Sung was the one that killed Juliena, and even though the others helped him in the fight, our lovely regressor was the one that fought her from beginning to end.

I was sure that Lee Sang-Hee knew exactly what she needed to say right now.

"F-First, I would like to announce that we've successfully taken control of the epic-ranked dungeon, Cursed Shrine. Let's clean up the area and search around to see if there are other items or corpses from other guilds. We'll have three people in one group, so if you find something special, please report it right away. I'll make sure we calculate everything once we return to the guild. Miss Ga-Hyeon, please return to the guild right now and report the expedition group's situation," she ordered.

“Also…”

“…”

“It’s a bit early to say this, but I’m sure that all of you already know the Cursed Sword’s owner. If… the Cursed Sword…”

The moment Lee Sang-Hee was at a loss for words.

Buzz…

“Huh?”

Buzz!

‘What the… ’

The sword that was stuck on the floor started floating into the air by itself and of course, everyone had their guards up. While no one knew what to do because this was their first time seeing something like this, the Cursed Sword slowly got closer to me. The strange thing was that I didn’t feel any hostility from it.

“Is it choosing its owner?”

After hearing someone say that, I immediately realized what was going on. As the sword approached me with a faint light, it kept releasing vibrating noises as it looked at me.

‘What is this… ’

I had no idea what was going to happen.

‘Don’t do this.’

Buzz!

‘I’m not a swordsman, you idiot.’

Kim Hyun-Sung looked very confused.

'This isn't… shit… this isn't right. Hyun-Sung, trust me. This wasn't what I wanted.'

CHAPTER 98
JULIENA (3)

I noticed how messed up Kim Hyun-Sung looked. He already got treated through holy magic, but despite that, there were still wounds on his body. Of course, he would look like that since he had just experienced a crazy fight. Juliena's tentacles must have gotten him because there were small holes all over his body and half of the armor he was wearing had broken off. Not to mention that his arm that got injured because of the black cross that fell from the sky was still getting treated. Just from his outer appearance alone, he looked pitiful, but me on the other hand…

'I don't have a scratch on me.'

I looked clean without a single wound on me. When the sword approached me, Kim Hyun-Sung looked like a man sending his lover away so, of course, I felt like I was walking on eggshells.

"I've heard that legendary ranked items usually select their owner. I don't know the details, but I believe that's what's happening right now," Hwang Jung-Yeon explained.

"Yes, I think I've heard that too."

'Please don't do this to me… '

Personally, I was so confused by this ridiculous situation that I couldn't speak and I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung felt the same way. My heart started breaking at the thought that he went over his limits just to obtain this legendary-ranked item. He had to obtain a glorious victory just to acquire this item. It wasn't intentional, but I basically ruined his big plan.

'Damn it… I have no use for it… '

"I-I don't know why it's suddenly doing this either," I said.

When I looked away, the sword that was floating followed my eyes.

Buzz…

It also kept buzzing.

“Can I reject being its owner?” I asked.

“It is possible, but… there isn't a lot of information about legendary-ranked items yet. Based on the situation, I don’t think it’s going to back off easily.”

“Then how about letting Mr. Hyun-Sung grab it? I’m not a swordsman and I don’t really need this item. It’ll be better if Mr. Hyun-Sung uses it,” I suggested.

“Okay. Mr. Hyun-Sung, I think it’ll be best to try it.”

“*Oh…* okay,” he said.

Naturally, everyone focused their attention on him and even Kim Hyun-Sung slowly reached his hand out toward it nervously. He must have heard a lot of information about legendary-ranked items, so I was certain that he knew about the Cursed Sword as well. This could have been the same sword he used in his past life or this could be a sword he had longed for so long.

He looked nervous and I couldn’t help but realize that he really worked hard to obtain this sword. Kim Hyun-Sung had an uncertain expression.

The moment he grabbed the sword, dark energy started to flow out around the sword. It happened so suddenly that the expedition members started to run.

Craaaackle!

After seeing that, Kim Hyun-Sung released a deep breath and let go of the sword. I noticed him glancing my way with a disappointed look after sighing. This was my first time seeing him with this expression and it caused my heart to break.

‘Ah… damn… ’

“I don’t think it’ll work. It seems like it has already decided on its owner,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Oh… well I…”

“The sword probably has a very strong ego. It’s a bit unfortunate, but there’s not much that we can do about it. Mr. Ki-Young had put in the most work in taking control of this dungeon, so he’s more than worthy to accept this sword. I even received help from Mr. Ki-Young during the last part of the fight. To be honest, if there hadn’t been an opening, I don’t know what could have happened,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Wait, even if I accept an item I can’t use…”

“I’m sure this isn’t something you can reject even if you want to, Mr. Ki-Young, especially this sword. You’ll feel it as soon as you grab the sword. It had already made up its mind. Even if someone else tried to use it by force, it’ll be no different from a wooden sword. You’re the only one that’s able to use its potential, so it’s only right for you to use it, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“What kind of alchemist would use a sword…”

Everyone looked disappointed. Me using this sword was no different from throwing pearls before swine. My strength and stamina were weak. I was obviously going to run out of breath after swinging it a few times. I wanted to desperately tell it to not do this, but the Cursed Sword completely ignored my opinion.

As if it couldn’t wait any longer, the dark energy that was flowing out of the sword started to wrap around me.

“Uh… *oh!*”

My arms were being lifted against my will.

“Someone please…”

I glanced over at the others, but it happened so suddenly. Before I could even use my hands, my hands grabbed the hilt of the sword and when it did, I saw a familiar message.

[Legendary-ranked item, Cursed Sword. You’ve been acknowledged as Juliena’s owner. Congratulations on being the owner of the legendary sword.]

'Shit… acknowledge my ass. I don't want it. I didn't acknowledge it.'

[Juliena, the Cursed Sword - Legendary Rank]

[This was the sword that the cursed saint, Juliena used. A.S., the god of curses gave this sword to Juliena tens of thousands of years ago and no matter how much time passes, it remains durable. It inflicts the highest level curse and it immediately damages the target's mind when the target gets wounded by the sword. Magic is necessary in order to use A.S.'s energy. The target, once exposed to its energy for a long time, will be cursed as well. Use a large amount of mana to cast a wide curse. Summoning and reverse summoning is possible as well. Before Juliena died, she desperately sealed her soul. Her ego, which was for Gedric, is asleep. The sword will move on its own and protect its owner from threats. A few of the sword's skills have been locked due to your low growth potential. Magic will be increased by 15. - Gedric… My love, Gedric]

'Sh… it… I acknowledge it.'

I only cursed at myself for a moment and when I glanced at the sword, I realized that a good thing had happened. The stat was so ridiculous that I couldn't help but open my mouth. Its stat couldn't be compared to any of the items I had seen so far.

In this dungeon, I had already witnessed just how much power the curse had. Considering how it almost swallowed the talented Blue Guild, having the ability to cast a curse was enough to call it a legendary item. Of course, I wouldn't be able to do what Juliena did with my magic, but the possibilities were overflowing. In addition, it increased my magic by 15 points. Unfortunately, it still didn't change the fact that I was a dummy when it came to magic, but I couldn't help but feel that there was still hope for me in that department. Another thing that was worth pointing out was that it would protect me on its own. Since Juliena's ego was sealed inside it, it looked like a new skill was added, but it was a skill that I needed the most.

The problem was…

'Juliena.'

I had to figure out how I would handle it when that crazy woman woke up again. Despite not knowing what Gedric looked like, thinking that I may have to pretend to be him again gave me a headache.

"The ownership is complete."

The expedition members sounded a bit dejected.

"I'm… re-really sorry about this. I didn't know this…"

"It's fine. When thinking about the things you did, you're more than worthy of having it, even though it's a bit strange for an alchemist to use a sword… maybe we should start training together," Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"Considering the situation, it might be best if you learned a bit about how to use a sword. I'll at least teach you the basics," he offered.

'I feel like he's trying to get back at me… '

For some reason, I felt anxious.

'Is he mad?'

I couldn't imagine Kim Hyun-Sung being mad, but it was obvious through his expression that he was mad. I couldn't help but smile because I realized that Kim Hyun-Sung was a human that wasn't any different from us.

When I looked around, I saw our party members. Park Deok-Gu looked proud while Sun Hee-Young and Jung Ha-Yan looked a bit strange, but it didn't bother me. The other parties were jealous, but since they were all indebted to me, they still clapped for me. They looked as if they wanted me to explain about Juliena, so I couldn't help but talk about it.

"I'm… not really sure about the quality of the sword, but the abilities that are embedded inside it are really good. It… has the ability to curse people and it even protects me, autonomously."

“What?”

Kim Hyun-Sung was the one that seemed a bit surprised. It was probably because it was a skill that didn’t exist in his past life. If there was a crazy guy that pretended to be Gedric in his past life, the situation could have been different, but I was certain that my actions had been unprecedented.

“Oh, I guess the others aren’t able to read it. It’s written here that Juliena’s ego is sealed inside here. I think the sword will move on its own when it senses danger. I do feel a bit uncomfortable by the fact that it uses my mana, but… that’s probably… because it thinks that I’m Gedric,” I explained.

“Oh, I see.”

‘I need to become Gedric.’

In order to prevent my sword from killing me, I thought that I needed to become Gedric. If it caught on to the fact that I wasn’t Gedric, it could become problematic. Thanks to the fight earlier, Juliena was asleep and that was good news. Even though I had obtained a lot of things, there were things that gave me a headache.

I did feel a bit relieved by the fact that Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t seem as dejected as I thought. Not only that, but he lightly nodded when I mentioned that the sword could move on its own.

‘Did he determine that the sword was useful?’

It was a possibility. I was sure that he thought it would be best if he used it himself, but based on the current situation, there wasn’t anything he could do about it. Other than the frown on his face, he seemed fine. In some ways, this Cursed Sword could be one of the many legendary ranked items that Kim Hyun-Sung knew about. I probably wasn’t worthy enough to make this kind of judgment, but Kim Hyun-Sung’s nature and this sword weren’t a good match. If I had to think of a different owner, probably…

‘Jung Jin-Ho?’

I thought that it would be more compatible with the crazy murderer that we met in the tutorial dungeon.

“Congratulations, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Oh… thank you,” I said.

“I know the situation turned out bad, but if you understand…”

“Yes, I understand. It’s unfortunate, but Miss Lee Sang-Hee, there’s nothing I can do about this,” he said.

“I know you don’t need our acknowledgment, but for the legendary-ranked item, the Cursed Sword, we acknowledge that it’s yours. Now that we’re almost done with this place, we’ll head back to Lindel after we’re done with the request that I gave. Let’s head back,” she said.

“Okay.”

I benefited a lot from this dungeon control. Of course, the Blue Guild’s power had decreased tremendously due to the failure of the expedition and although it may sound a bit harsh, the situation wasn’t that bad when looking at it long term. I wasn’t sure what kind of decision Lee Sang-Hee was going to make from now on, but considering the fact that she felt burdened for being the sub-guild master, I thought that maybe she would willingly resign from her position.

Kim Hyun-Sung and I were going to change the Blue Guild into how we wanted it and I could say with confidence that this expedition had been worth doing in order to achieve that goal.

‘Ha-Yan’s condition also improved a lot… ’

It felt like everyone leveled up through this expedition, but there were still things I needed to take care of. Park Deok-Gu, who stopped growing, and the task I asked Lee Ji-Hye to do. I did get the feeling that I still had some unfinished business.

Maybe it was because of the sword that was in my hand, but I couldn’t help but smile. Walking around with this sword out would become problematic, so while using my mana, I mumbled. “Reverse summoning.”

[The Cursed Sword has rejected reverse summoning.]

“…”

‘Reverse summoning.’

[The Cursed Sword has rejected reverse summoning.]

'Return.'

[The Cursed Sword has strongly rejected reverse summoning.]

'Shit! Return!'

[The Cursed Sword has strongly rejected reverse summoning. The Cursed Sword would like to be with you. The Cursed Sword is saying that it loves you. The Cursed Sword is saying that it wants to be with you. The Cursed Sword is getting angry.]

"Return! Please!"

It had definitely been a satisfactory expedition.

CHAPTER 99
JULIENA (4)

“Mr. Ki-Young, what’s written on there?”

“Oh, Miss Hee-Young. It’s a story about Gedric and Juliena. I thought I should *ugh…* know about it since I have this sword,” I answered.

“*Oh,* are you talking about the book that’s inside the room?” she asked.

“That’s right. It was worth a read since it sounded like a legendary story… *hm…* anyway, it was an interesting read,” I told her.

“That’s great. Could you tell me what it’s about?” she asked.

Sun Hee-Young looked really curious. On our way back to Lindel, I noticed her glancing at me, so I guess she was really curious. Aside from when we went volunteering together, we never really talked, so I thought that it wouldn’t be a bad idea to talk to her. Jung Ha-Yan watched as Sun Hee-Young grabbed my arm, but that only lasted for a moment as she looked as if she wanted me to tell the story. I was sure that even Jung Ha-Yan had gotten bored of us just walking.

‘It’s not a long story anyways.’

I thought that it wouldn’t be a bad idea to enjoy the story while heading toward our destination.

“The story begins exactly 10,000 years ago,” I said.

“10,000 years ago?”

“Yes. It takes place before the Holy Empire, Benigoa, appeared. It said that there was a devastating war during that time; a religious war between the followers that believed in the God of Curses and the followers that believed in the God of Blessings,” I continued.

"*Ohh…*"

"Have you heard of it?" I asked Sun Hee-Young.

"I have heard of it since the current Holy Empire exists because of the religious war during that time. It's an interesting story," she answered.

"During that time, Juliena was a saint that served the God of Curses and Gedric was a holy man that served the God of Blessings. They never encountered each other, but they always stood on the frontline while listening to stories about each other. It was said that the two met on the frontline 15 years after the war started. Anyway, a large battle took place where the majority of the soldiers started fighting," I said.

"Battle of the Berman Cliffs," Sun Hee-Young said.

"Do you know of it?" I asked.

"The majority of people that devote themselves to the shrine know about it. We didn't learn much about Juliena and Gedric, but… if the book that you're carrying is true, then it'll be a new page in history," she answered.

"I'm not sure how the people of the Holy Empire will react, but… if we're lucky, that's a possibility. Haha. Anyway, many followers died and as Gedric and Juliena fought until the very end, they fell off the cliff and the war ended that day," I told her.

"What happened after?" she asked.

"There aren't any records of that day, however, it's written here that Juliena and Gedric returned to their shrines exactly one year later. Details were written in Juliena's diary, but there's information that I'm embarrassed to say, so it's difficult for me to explain," I said.

I was certain that Sun Hee-Young had an idea about it. Gedric and Juliena survived together for nearly a year in a cave on the cliff they fell off of and in the end, they started to have feelings for each other. When I vaguely explained what happened in the cave, I noticed the others nodding. I must have sounded like I excluded the extreme parts of the story and only told the exciting parts because Park Deok-Gu or Dr. Love slowly started moving toward me.

"I think that's when Gedric and Juliena started seeing each other. Since the war

entered a lull, they had more opportunities to meet. Both sides must have been severely injured because of the Battle of the Berman Cliffs. Naturally, both gods tried to separate them, but they were so deeply in love with each other that all they cared about was each other," I said.

"I think I understand why they ended up in this situation," Sun Hee-Young said.

"Their actions caused both gods to become angry and during all of this, Gedric created a small shrine within the God of Blessings' shrine… and that was the Cursed Shrine, the same dungeon we were just in. They grew their love there and in the end, the gods' anger caused them to bind the two to the shrine," I explained.

"*Oh…*"

The God of Curses cursed Juliena so that she wouldn't be able to escape the small room within the Cursed Shrine and the God of Blessings blessed Gedric so that he would always long for Juliena. They made it so that he would always wander around the Cursed Shrine searching for Juliena. Naturally, the God of Blessings didn't allow Gedric to find Juliena.

"That's so sad."

When Jung Ha-Yan said that, Sun Hee-Young nodded and I continued.

"No wonder they got cursed. Creating another shrine below the shrine that serves a different god… it's an idea that's very difficult to understand. I'm sure the Undead that was outside the Cursed Shrine was influenced by the curse that the God of Blessings had placed on them."

"In Gedric's diary, it mentioned that the God of Blessings blessed them with eternal life, but to them, it was no different from a curse. That's the end of the story. Juliena waited for Gedric who would never find her and Gedric would forever get lost in the shrine while struggling to find Juliena," I said.

It wasn't a serious story, but I guess Jung Ha-Yan was really touched by it because she was already tearing up.

"I-It's sad. She had been waiting for the person that would never find her…"

Naturally, I patted her head and as if this was her chance, she jumped into my arms.

“Then are you saying that the Undead we found in the left room back then was Gedric, hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yeah, that’s right,” I answered.

While we were searching for potential survivors, we found Gedric and a group of Undead. Maybe they were influenced by Juliena’s death, but they couldn’t move anymore and for a long time, we couldn’t identify the Undead that we had discovered. We only found out the identity of one of them because it was holding an interesting item.

[Gedric’s Proposal Ring - Epic Rank]

[Resistant to Juliena’s curse.]

When I looked at the item that was sitting in my hand, I had an idea as to how this dungeon was originally supposed to be taken over. Now, I understood why Kim Hyun-Sung always wandered around at night and what was the identity of the Undead that the former party had seen. The way to take control of the dungeon was to find the wandering Gedric. Basically, after defeating the monster named Gedric that would randomly spawn in the dungeon, the party would obtain the ability to resist the curse. It was a tricky method, which was expected for an epic-ranked dungeon.

The shrine was big and considering the possibility that the party may have never found Gedric, it was basically the same as having no way of taking control of the dungeon. They had no choice but to be exposed to Juliena’s curse and slowly die. As for our party, we found a way to resist the curse before finding Gedric. Of course, I knew for sure that Kim Hyun-Sung would have found Gedric sooner or later, but the result wasn’t bad at all.

“Love is definitely scary.”

“I agree.”

I could relate better than anyone else. It was obvious just by looking at Jung Ha-Yan

who was in my arms.

Anyway, I had no choice but to gather information about Gedric. Even though Juliena's ego was still asleep inside the sword, I didn't know when she was going to wake up so I had to prepare for that day.

"It's been a while since we've been here, but I don't see the people that told us that they were going to bring reinforcements," Park Deok-Gu pointed out.

"Who?" I asked.

"Old man Lee Seol-Ho," he answered.

"*Ohh.* It's possible that the Red Mercenary Guild hasn't returned yet and I'm sure that there must have been other problems too. Honestly, we did take control of the dungeon faster than we thought," I said.

"But still, shouldn't they have at least brought other people? It was a good thing that you and bro Kim Hyun-Sung were there otherwise, we could have died," he complained.

"I'm sure there's a reason," I told him.

'Reason my ass… '

I knew for sure that they wanted us to die there because that would put them in a slightly advantageous situation. It may seem a bit iffy due to the timing, but it seemed like Lee Sang-Hee was thinking that Lee Seol-Ho and the other old gramps had a reason for not sending us support.

"You being too nice is a problem, hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu told me.

Both Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan agreed, but something seemed strange about Sun Hee-Young.

'I'm sure that she still doesn't like those old gramps.'

Lee Seol-Ho and the other gramps were no different from the vagrants in the slums. They were useless and wouldn't take matters into their own hands. They would sit in their seats and try to make a profit somehow. I had said this before, but the only

difference between them and the vagrants in the slums was that the old gramps had been just a bit luckier. To Sun Hee-Young, they were nothing more than a lump of cancer to society.

'I wonder how Ji-Hye is doing.'

I suddenly recalled the task I gave to Lee Ji-Hye. I was certain that she would complete the task I asked her to do almost perfectly, but since we finished earlier than expected, I couldn't help but think that she wasn't done with it yet. Just then, someone ran up to us.

'Park Ga-Hyeon?'

In front of us was Park Ga-Hyeon, the same person Lee Sang-Hee asked to head to the guild first. Naturally, I sensed that there was something wrong with the way she ran toward us. I was looking forward to the news she had for us, but on the other hand, I felt a bit on edge because she seemed very anxious and a bit worried for someone who wanted to deliver good news. When she arrived in front of Lee Sang-Hee, she spoke while catching her breath. "*Ha… ha…* sub-guild master."

"Did you deliver the news? Why are you…"

"I finished everything you asked me to do, but… I-I need to tell you something… I had no choice but to come…" Park Ga-Hyeon said.

"Calm down and tell us the news," Lee Sang-Hee said.

She seemed worried. She looked like she was thinking about whether it was okay to say it in front of us, but I guess she made up her mind. Not long after, I heard her voice. "The… guild master passed away."

"Excuse me?" Lee Sang-Hee asked.

"The guild master… passed away," she said again.

"What are you… the curse should've been broken…"

"He passed away exactly three days ago. He passed away in his sleep… I-I thought that it would be best to tell you first…" Park Ga-Hyeon said.

"…"

I noticed Lee Sang-Hee biting down her lips and I also saw Park Ga-Hyeon crying. Even though I had never laid my eyes on the Blue Guild's guild master, I guess he wasn't a bad person. Everyone was saddened by his death.

Honestly, the situation wasn't bad for our party because if there was no guild master, then it would be easier for us to get power, however…

'So suddenly?'

The timing of his death was definitely strange because it was an advantageous timing for the old gramps for it to be a simple, natural death. It could be dangerous if a person was exposed to a curse for a long time, but for some reason…

'Was it Lee Seol-Ho?'

It was only an assumption, but it was convincing.

"Let's hurry to the guild… I know you're all tired, but let's walk… faster," Lee Sang-Hee said.

"Okay."

It was what we wanted and just like that, the expedition started walking with a slightly heavy heart. Maybe it was because of the unexpected news, but Lee Sang-Hee was quietly leading the group and the other party members walked silently while comforting Lee Sang-Hee.

The Free City of Lindel came into view. Before we reached the city, Lee Ji-Hye came out to meet us with the old gramps. Seeing how there were a few members of the Black Swan Guild as well, I guess they wanted to show that they were heading toward us. I couldn't help but laugh because of their ridiculous actions.

"Congratulations on your safe return, Miss Lee Sang-Hee. We were just about to leave…"

"More than that, what happened to the guild master, Mr. Seol-Ho? Did he really pass away?" Lee Sang-Hee asked.

“Yes, he passed away peacefully,” Lee Seol-Ho answered.

“Wh-Where’s his body?” she asked.

“We moved his body to the basement of the guild for now. We were actually thinking about how we should hold the funeral. It happened so suddenly three days ago…” he replied.

“*Ah…*”

I was no longer interested in their conversation. While Lee Seol-Ho and Lee Sang-Hee continued their conversation, I looked at Lee Ji-Hye and when I tapped my head with my finger, she smiled and tapped her leg.

‘I knew it.’

I should probably listen to the details.

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